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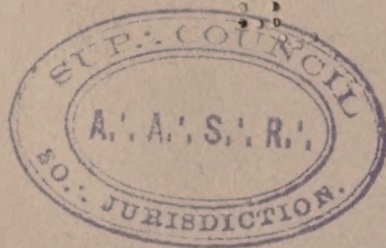
THE
LOST DESPATCH.

F. O. Howe

Translated from the German of Friedrich Friedrich.

BY

L. A. WILLIAMS.



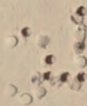
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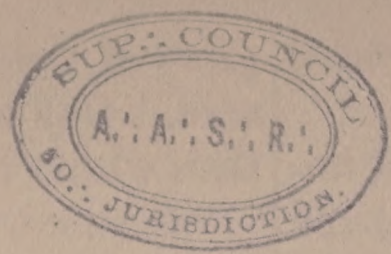
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THE LOST DESPATCH.

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THE BARON VON ELKA was walking with his wife in a garden laid out like a park. The lindens which arched above them, forming a shady roof, were in full blossom; thousands of bees hummed among the branches; and every breath of wind bore the refreshing fragrance of flowers over the whole garden. The large and neatly-kept plots of grass glimmered with the freshest green, — an agreeable resting-point for the wearied eye. The garden was bounded by the river which flowed around the city; and only occasional sounds from the noisy town penetrated to these shaded avenues.

Silently the baron walked by the side of his wife. His figure was tall and slight, his age about fifty. Not the slightest glimpse of white was yet to be seen in his black hair; but his form was somewhat bowed, his head a little bent, as though the cares and hard experiences of life were pressing heavily upon him. His face was nobly formed and finely cut; but its extreme pallor, as well as the strange, enthusiastic expression of his dark eyes, which at any excitement flashed with unusual brilliancy, betrayed extraordinary sensitiveness and irritability of the nerves.

Very unlike her husband was the baroness. Although she was forty years old, the freshness of youth still rested upon her face. Her blue eyes could laugh as brightly and freely as if but twenty times she had seen the lindens bloom. With the most perfect right she passed still for a beautiful woman, who might even become dangerous to the heart of a young man. And she still felt young also.

Wandering on, they reached a hillock, skilfully constructed, which was yet high enough to overlook part of the town. There the baron threw himself on to a garden-seat, exhausted.

“Leonore,” said he, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, “the intimacy between Arthur and Alice seems suspicious to me.”

The baroness looked searchingly for a moment into the face of her husband.

“You forget that Arthur is her cousin,” she then replied.

A faint smile passed over the face of the baron.

“Do you think this relationship will prevent her from loving him, if they are together every day, if she walks and rides with him alone? Arthur possesses qualities well-fit-

ted to win the heart of a young girl."

The baroness did not seem to understand the words of her husband aright, for her gaze was still fixed questioningly upon him.

"You say yourself that he has amiable qualities," she observed; "and I am convinced that Alice would be happy by his side."

"Pray, Leonore, pursue this thought no further," interrupted Elka. "I will not dispute the possibility of their happiness. But Alice can never be Arthur's wife; and therefore I wish to guard their hearts from an affection which they will be compelled to overcome and renounce."

"Oscar, I do not understand you," said the baroness. "I cannot comprehend the necessity of opposing the union of Arthur and Alice. She would have many difficulties to contend with; for, if my observation is correct, they have already come to an understanding, and their hearts are united."

The baron rose in great excitement. The enthusiastic expression vanished from his eyes: they now looked clear and penetrating.

"I hope you are mistaken," he exclaimed almost passionately. "I wish it for Alice's sake; for I repeat once more, she can never be Arthur's wife."

"Oscar, you are speaking in riddles," remarked the baroness.

Elka paced swiftly up and down with his hands crossed behind. His eye glanced searchingly around to see if any listener were near. No one could approach to within thirty

paces of the hillock without being seen. One was more secure there than within the walls of a room.

"Leonore, I should have been glad if you had spared me this explanation," he at length replied. "Questions are thereby touched, the discussion of which is disagreeable to us both. And yet you must know all. I love Arthur, not because he is my sister's son, but because his frank, cheerful disposition has won my heart; but his circumstances compel me to be against him. It is for his interest to choose a wealthy maiden; and a like interest restricts me in choosing a husband for Alice. It is painful to me to confess that I need a rich or influential son-in-law, on whom I can lean; and Arthur would in no wise afford me this support. I have sacrificed my property to my position as ambassador, and must therefore make every effort to restore my fortune by means of this position. It would be folly to reproach you or myself because we have lived too lavishly: I form my own opinion as to the past, and fix my gaze only upon the future."

"So you will sacrifice your daughter's happiness to a cold calculation?" interrupted the baroness.

Elka continued his walk without looking up.

"You call it cold calculation; I, calm consideration of given circumstances. No man is able entirely to separate himself from the circumstances in which he lives and has grown up. Were I in a position to give Alice a rich dowry, I

would welcome Arthur as a son-in-law, and I do not doubt that they would be happy; but I know also that their happiness would be subjected to a very severe test if want should in any way approach them. I am too little an enthusiast to believe in the all-conquering power of love."

"Not very flattering to me," remarked the baroness half-jestingly, half-reproachfully. "If you had only taken the subject into consideration earlier, before Alice had learned to know Arthur: now I fear it is already too late."

"I know not the words 'too late,'" replied Elka with decision. "Alice is not yet Arthur's wife; she is not yet his betrothed even."

"They are already looked upon as betrothed," broke in the baroness.

Elka shrugged his shoulders half-scornfully.

"And if Alice is betrothed to another young man to-morrow, then people will see that they have been mistaken. Dear Leonore, I care very little, perhaps not at all, for the opinion of others in such affairs; for men are strangely inconsiderate in their judgments. I cannot inform Alice of the circumstances which prejudice me against Arthur; but I hope you will exercise all your motherly influence to prevent any earnest love for him from arising in her heart."

The baroness did not answer. It was very hard for her to comply with the request of her husband. For years, she had cherished with special pleasure the hope that Alice

and Arthur might be united; and now, when she seemed about to realize her hope, her husband stepped in to destroy it. She did not think of opposing the wish which he described to her as a pressing necessity; for she well knew the judiciousness of his character, and the unbending firmness of his will.

Never before had he spoken to her of his pecuniary affairs. She knew that he was not rich, and had often thought that she could read the pressure of care in the lines upon his brow; but she had never questioned him on the subject. Her life was passed in such a whirl of excitement, that she had no time for serious thought. The fact that her husband had now touched upon his circumstances was sufficient proof to her that they had become very oppressive.

"What you demand from me is difficult, yes, impossible," she at length replied. "I am to shield Alice's heart from an earnest love, when it has already taken possession of her. Oscar, I have always submitted to your wishes; but I must indeed demand that you confide your plans to me. I think our interests are the same; and, in attaining them, we may go hand in hand."

The baron silently continued his walk. He scarcely seemed to have heard the words of his wife.

"Have you any definite plan for Alice in your mind?" continued the baroness. "Have you already chosen a husband for her?"

Elka bowed his head in assent.

"And who is it?"

The baron stood still before his wife.

"Leonore, it was my intention to conceal this from you, because the attainment of my desire demands the greatest caution; nevertheless, it will be better to inform you of every thing, for you are too sensible to betray my wishes. The man whom I have in view for Alice is the son of the minister von Altenberg. You may remember that he was remarkably attentive to her when we met him at a watering-place last year. He will be here in a few days, his father tells me, to spend several weeks; and I think I am not mistaken in connecting this visit with his interest in Alice."

During these words, the baron's eyes rested searchingly upon the face of his wife; and he could not fail to see her disappointment.

"Surely, Capt. von Altenberg is little fitted to drive Arthur's image from Alice's heart. I remember that every one was struck with his disagreeable appearance and unamiable manner."

The baron frowned, for his wife's words affected him very unpleasantly; but he tried to repress this feeling forcibly.

"You judge too sharply, dear Leonore," he interrupted. "I grant that Altenberg is less pleasing than Arthur; but considerable property, and his father's influence, must be thrown into the scale: these will assuredly outweigh Arthur's handsome face and agreeable manners."

"In your opinion and in mine," interposed the baroness; "but in Alice's heart? I doubt it."

"In hers, also, when she takes into consideration that marriage is something more than a passing infatuation, a brief day of blooming flowers. She cannot hide from herself the fact that Altenberg will be able to make her life far pleasanter than Arthur. And, if it should really be a sacrifice to her, I am, unfortunately, in such a position that I must demand this sacrifice from her. I need not point out the great advantages which a close connection with Altenberg would bring to me. You know his extensive power as minister: I do not believe in a change of this power, for all his prudence and energy are exerted to strengthen his position. If Alice becomes his daughter-in-law, I doubt not that I also shall be called into the ministry; and the object of my desires will then be attained. I hope that your wishes also point to this end."

The eyes of the baroness flashed, her proud mind pondered for a moment on this thought; and then the sudden fear seized her that the happiness of her child would be sacrificed, and still the desired object might not be reached. She expressed this fear to her husband.

Elka smiled, and in that smile betrayed the subtlety and superiority of his mind. He was a diplomatist, and had learned to wish and strive only for those things whose difficulty of attainment he had accurately weighed beforehand. No bold move lay in his calculations; but they were delicate and sure.

"I shall not sacrifice Alice's

happiness uselessly," he replied, repeating the expression of his wife: "I will rather establish her happiness, though I may, perhaps, destroy one of the illusions of her youth."

At this moment, Alice and Arthur emerged from one of the shady paths, laughing and chatting, and drew near the hillock. Alice hastened towards her parents in the brightest frame of mind.

Her appearance was wondrously fair and sweet. Her delicate face wore an expression almost of melancholy, when at rest, and her eyes were cast down; but as soon as they were raised, and a smile played about her mouth, such a merry, wanton spirit shone forth as is only known to youth which has never felt the approach of care or disappointment. She shook her dark locks which fell over her shoulders; she laughed so gayly, so unrestrainedly, that her joyous spirit captivated all with an irresistible charm.

She was scarcely eighteen, and never felt so happy as when, freed from the strict formalities of society, she could wander in her father's garden in all the joy of youth. She seemed then like a child, who, escaping from a close room, rushes out into the sunshine, and smiles upon forest and flower, shakes off every care, and lives only in the present, like the bird, which, singing, swings upon the tree-top.

Arthur von Walter stood by her side, a merry companion, who had been for a few weeks a guest in her father's house. His disposi-

tion was frank and cheerful, like hers. He had inherited a small property from his father, which was so heavily encumbered with debts, that it yielded but little income; yet he had never wished to possess more, for it afforded him the means to gratify his desires, — to ride on a bright morning through wood and plain, to stretch himself under the shade of an oak or beech, and overlook his green, blooming fields, or, at twilight, to sit at the edge of the forest, and feel the gentle, gradual fading of evening into the rest of night.

He loved a simple life, because he had never really known any other.

The baroness had not been mistaken in thinking that Alice and Arthur were in love. It needed but a glance to see that their hearts were united. They had loved each other for years, without confessing their love, or being fully conscious of it; but it was the first bud of affection in their hearts, and therefore possessed that deep and inexpressible freshness which is never again attained if the heart's first and true love is destroyed.

The baron's eye rested upon his daughter with evident pleasure. Her cheeks were slightly flushed; her light straw hat rested so jauntily upon her dark locks: smilingly he held out his hand to her. Not a feature of his face betrayed the grave subject he had just been discussing with his wife.

"Where now, Fly-away?" he asked in a sportive tone.

"To the river. Arthur has promised to give me a sail," answered Alice cheerfully. "He asserts that he is very skilful with the oar; but I doubt it, and am going to convince myself as to his dexterity."

"I also share your doubts," continued Elka in a light tone, "and consider the trial all the more hazardous."

"I am an expert rower," interrupted Arthur.

"Well, well," said Elka, smiling, "we will put your skill to the test to-morrow, I wish to witness it myself; but to-day I desire to run away with you. I am longing for a good ride on horseback, and hope you will accompany me."

"I will ride with you also," said Alice.

"Will you leave your mother alone?" asked Elka. His voice was so soft and entreating, that it was hard to resist it. "We shall ride to the estate of one of my friends, who is not in a condition to receive ladies, since he is still unmarried. Come, Arthur, let us order the horses. I hope you give me your company willingly."

"Certainly," replied Arthur; and yet he did not tell the truth. A feeling of pain flashed over him because he was obliged to leave Alice. How happy had he been by her side!

He was not skilful enough to conceal his feelings. Disappointed, out of humor, he walked along by the side of his uncle, who did not seem to notice what was going on in his mind, but talked in an easy,

unrestrained manner on the most indifferent subjects.

A few minutes later, they left the baron's charming estate, and rode at a brisk trot through a shady avenue, towards a neighboring forest.

Smaller and smaller became the number of pedestrians whom they met; but not until they were quite alone did Elka draw the rein, and allow his horse to move more slowly.

"Do you know Capt. von Altenberg?" he suddenly asked.

Arthur looked at his uncle, as if he would read in his face the reason for this question: but his countenance betrayed nothing; it was calm and friendly.

"I know him, but only slightly," he answered.

"Well, then, you will have an opportunity to know him better, as he is coming here in a few days," continued Elka in a quiet, gossiping sort of way. "He will stay several weeks, and I hope you will be good friends."

Arthur angrily thrust the spurs into his horse's flanks, so that the animal reared. The baron saw this in a rapid side-glance, and suspected the cause. An almost imperceptible smile of satisfaction played around his lips.

"I have doubts as to this friendship," replied Arthur with a sudden touch of bitterness.

"And why? Altenberg possesses excellent qualities when one knows him intimately."

"I have only met him once at a club," continued Arthur; "and his conduct towards me was so haugh-

ty, that our meeting came near ending with a duel."

Elka listened attentively.

"Young hot-heads!" he cried, laughing. "And how did that happen?"

"Spare me the recital; for the bitterness which I then felt would only be roused anew. What good would it do? You will never be able to convince me of Altenberg's amiability; and I am not the only one who entertains an unfavorable opinion of him."

The baron did not hear these last words, which Arthur evidently added with reference to Alice.

"I do not wish to press any conviction upon you," he answered lightly; "but I would not have you form rash judgments. I doubt not that your meeting with Altenberg was disagreeable; I will even believe that no blame attaches to yourself in the matter, though I may give your hot head some credit also; but such a slight acquaintance does not justify you in forming an opinion of a man."

"Alice has the same opinion; and she has had an opportunity to know him better," interrupted Arthur.

"Alice is a silly girl," replied Elka. "She is still a child; and it is to be hoped that you will not be governed by her opinion. Alice is not in a position to judge the character of a man. I need not ask you to receive Altenberg in a friendly manner: he will be my guest; and you understand, furthermore, that I have a regard for his father."

Arthur was silent.

"Can my words have affected you unpleasantly?" asked Elka. "I did not mean to offend you."

"No, no!" cried Arthur quickly, with difficulty concealing the excitement under which he was laboring. "I understand your position perfectly, and will be polite to Altenberg, — very polite. The time for my visit has nearly expired, moreover; perhaps we shall not meet again."

A smile of satisfaction again stole over Elka's face. Arthur did not notice it, being fully occupied in managing his horse, which seemed to share his own uneasiness.

"You have not yet spoken of your departure," observed Elka. "You know my house is large enough to afford room for Altenberg and yourself at the same time, and I hope you will be able to agree on this neutral ground. You must hold a tighter rein: your horse seems very restless to-day. Come, let us satisfy the animal's spirit." With these words he gave the spur to his own horse; and they galloped swiftly along the forest-path.

The rapid ride did not allow the conversation to be carried on; and it was not the baron's wish to continue it. Arthur's decision to leave soon, satisfied him entirely; and therefore he desired to avoid any further explanation with the nephew whom he loved.

Arthur was out of tune; and Elka's gayest conversation failed to raise his spirits.

The baron's only intention in proposing a ride was to separate

Arthur from Alice; and he was therefore glad that the friend whom they went to see was away. They took a roundabout way home.

The servant met them with the announcement that Capt. von Altenberg had arrived during their absence.

Elka sprang from his horse in surprise. He cast one rapid glance at Arthur, from whose cheeks the blood had fled, and then hurried into the house to greet his guest.

The captain advanced to meet him. "I have come earlier than I intended," said he. "Your wife tells me you did not receive the despatch which was to announce my arrival. I do not yet know how the mistake occurred, but beg you to excuse it."

Elka extended his hand.

"I hope the mistake will afford you convincing proof that you are welcome here without any announcement. Had I known you were coming to-day, I certainly should not have denied myself the pleasure of meeting you at the station."

At that moment, Arthur entered the room. The captain's eye flashed, his brow contracted, and he intentionally turned his back to the newcomer.

In an unembarrassed manner Elka introduced his nephew.

"I believe you gentlemen have already met," he added with a smile.

Altenberg bowed in a cold, stiff way, endeavoring by this bow to deny all acquaintanceship.

"Indeed, I cannot remember. I doubt," he replied, carelessly twirl-

ing his mustache. "I really think I must disclaim the pleasure of the acquaintance."

The malignant look with which he surveyed Arthur gave the lie to his words.

Arthur pressed his lips firmly together: they trembled slightly; but he tried with all his might to control himself.

"My memory is more faithful," he said; "but I agree with you, that a single meeting, no matter what it may be, cannot be called an acquaintance."

The captain bestowed one piercing look upon him, and then turned to the baron.

"I think I am wrong, Herr Baron, in accepting the hospitality which you so kindly offer," said he, without taking any further notice of Arthur; "but I must throw the whole responsibility upon your own good nature. I could not resist the temptation to be near you for a while, — there, you have an open confession."

Elka replied in a cordial tone.

The appearance of Capt. von Altenberg was by no means attractive. His face could not be called exactly ugly; but an unpleasant expression was given to it by the piercing, gray-blue eyes which looked so staring. The wary look which they frequently wore gave a false and crafty expression to his face. Altenberg was only a few years older than Arthur; but his features plainly betrayed that he had already enjoyed life to excess. His movements were slack, and yet at the same time angular.

His unpromising exterior would have been tolerated, forgotten, had his manner been pleasing; but that, too, was little fitted to win friends for him. He was haughty, proud of the wealth and position of his father, and filled with a spirit of egotism, which allowed no regard for others, especially if they were beneath him, or unable to compete with him in wealth.

Arthur's unexpected presence was all the more displeasing to him, because he had sense enough to see that his fresh, prepossessing appearance could not fail to make an impression upon Alice. The baron was quite right in thinking that the captain's interest in his daughter had led him to make this visit.

Alice had not encouraged his attentions in the slightest degree; but her coldness only attracted him still more. He was accustomed to have his attentions favorably received by the ladies, and thought he possessed qualities which would win the heart of any maiden.

Arthur had left the room. The captain's conduct had filled him anew with bitterness. He was vexed at his uncle's friendly reception of Altenberg. He knew how attentive the captain had been to Alice the year before, and suspected that he had only come now in order to be near her. Jealousy stirred within him.

He wandered through the garden in the hope of meeting Alice: he searched in all her favorite places, in vain. He at length learned, through a servant, that she was in her room, busy with her toilet. He

could have laughed aloud in his sorrow.

"She is arraying herself for the captain," he said to himself. "She is making her toilet to receive him." She had told him that Altenberg was very repulsive to her; and yet she was bestowing such pains upon her dress! Could it be that she was trying to please him, that she was blinded by the wealth of this hateful man?

For the first time, he doubted the girl who filled his whole heart. In his passionate excitement, he did not think of the restraint which the forms of society imposed upon him. He flung himself upon a seat, and pressed both hands upon his brow.

What more could he do here? He had sported and jested with Alice; had served very well to entertain her, to walk and ride and sail with her: but, now that the captain had appeared, he was superfluous, perhaps he was even in the way. In his agitation, he suddenly resolved to take his leave on the following day. A longing for the quiet of his country-home came over him. There he could lie undisturbed beneath the shade of the forest-trees, and think of the happiness for which he had hoped so long, which had filled him with such blissful rapture, and now seemed lost forever. There he might mourn over this lost happiness, where no scornful eye could look upon him, mocking his grief. He must be alone. The noisy life of the city seemed to oppress him; and, in the midst of men, he seemed doubly forsaken.

He sat motionless, until a servant at length appeared to call him to supper. He felt inclined to absent himself, but soon decided to be present. He would not yield the field to his hated adversary without a struggle; he would see if Alice received him in a friendly manner; would be convinced for himself whether the words she had spoken to him were only falsehoods.

He hastened to his room to make his toilet.

When he entered the dining-room a few minutes afterwards, he saw Alice in animated conversation with the captain. Her dress was choice and tasteful: never before had she seemed so charming to him. White roses glimmered amid her dark locks; and a white garment, like misty gauze, enveloped her slender form. He heard her laugh; she clapped her hands; oh! she seemed highly amused at the captain's conversation.

Altenberg led Alice to the table; and Arthur seated himself by the side of his aunt. He looked at Alice; but she seemed to have no thoughts left for him: the captain claimed her whole attention.

He wished to be calm; he would not betray what was passing in his mind as he crumbled the bread which lay on his plate. Even as this bread was broken, so were his dreams dissolved, destroyed. He refused all food, but repeatedly emptied his wineglass at a single draught. In vain did the baroness, who suspected the cause of his disturbed state of mind, try to enter-

tain him. He scarcely heard her words.

"Do you not feel hungry, Arthur?" she inquired, seeing that his food was untouched.

"Oh, yes, yes!" replied Arthur, directing the servant to bring him other viands, which he put upon his plate, but did not taste, for just then he relapsed into his dreamy revery.

Had he only glanced at Alice, he would have seen how anxiously she looked over to him, as if begging for deliverance. She could not escape the tiresome flattery of the captain without seeming impolite, and committing a breach of hospitality. The longer they sat at the table, and the more wine Arthur drank, so much the more did his excitement increase. His bit of bread was long since crumbled to atoms; and he played with his knife, wildly thinking, as the bright blade glittered in the lamp-light, of thrusting it into his breast, and thus putting an end to his torment.

Then it would all be over; then could Alice celebrate her marriage with the captain, undisturbed by his presence; then there would be one witness the fewer to remind her of the bitter words she had spoken concerning the captain.

He did not do it.

He breathed more freely when the meal was at length ended, and was about to leave the hall, when Alice stepped up to him.

"Arthur, I must speak to you: wait for me in the garden," she whispered, and then rejoined the captain.

He was doubtful whether he

should obey her request; nevertheless, he hastened into the garden. Why did Alice wish to speak to him? Did she intend to excuse herself for transferring her whole interest to the captain? Would she assure him once more that the man who had entertained her so highly was repulsive to her? She might spare herself this trouble, for she was free to dispose of her heart as she pleased; and, moreover, he no longer believed her.

His blood boiled as he walked through the silent garden. All the shady avenues and quiet resting-places whispered to him of the happiness he had known by the side of Alice. He was in such a frame of mind, that he could have laughed loud and bitterly. What had justified him in believing in Alice's love? Was he rich? was his father minister? was he adorned with the gay uniform of a captain? His own folly, his credulous heart, had prepared this disappointment for him: he would like to silence that heart forever.

He threw himself upon a seat, under the dark shade of a linden. Here Alice could find him if she tried; for they had often sat in that place, reading, laughing, and jesting together.

His thoughts flew back over the past years. He still remembered the day when he first saw Alice, who was then a child. She came with her mother to make a visit at his country-home for the benefit of her delicate health. He had little curiosity to know his cousin, since she was but a child; but

when she sprang from the carriage, in a white dress, and looked at him with such a frank, child-like expression in her large dark eyes, while greeting him with outstretched hand, he felt the blood rushing from his face to his heart. The large dark eyes had bewitched him.

And day after day he had played with her, wandering through fields and woods: they had been inseparable.

When he saw her again, years afterwards, she had blossomed into a young lady. He met her with a feeling of embarrassment; but soon the old familiar tone was resumed, the old relation established.

All this passed through his mind like a dream; then suddenly Alice stood before him. He had not noticed her approach. He started up excitedly. Even in the twilight, he recognized the white roses in her dark hair. She had thrown a light shawl over her shoulders.

His heart beat violently; a nameless sorrow filled it. He had fancied himself strong enough to break away from her; but now, as she stood before him, he felt that it would cost him grief and conflict: still it must be done.

"It is well you have come, Alice," said he. "It was necessary for me to see you, in order to say that I shall leave early to-morrow morning. I shall start at dawn; and it would have been painful to go away without bidding you farewell."

"You are going away, Arthur!"

cried Alice. Her trembling voice betrayed her surprise.

"I am," replied Arthur. "I long for the quiet of my home, where I can dream of the past and of my shattered hopes. What should I do here?" he added bitterly. "You no longer need me to entertain you: the captain will do that much better."

"Stop!" interrupted Alice. "Arthur, you would not have spoken these words if you had known how deeply they grieve me. This, then, is what drives you away. You intend to forsake us; and just now I hoped to find a support in you."

She turned her head away; and Arthur could hear her weeping.

He could have shouted with joy at these tears; could have flung himself at her feet, and implored her pardon.

"Alice, Alice!" he cried, seizing her hand, "let me depart without reproaches, without a fresh burden on my heart. I cannot stay here, and see how the captain alone claims your interest: I cannot. You would understand me if you had a suspicion of the suffering I endured at the table to-night."

"Arthur, do you know me so little?" broke in Alice. "Do you not comprehend that my friendliness to Altenberg is only a sacrifice which I make to my father, and his relations with Altenberg's father? Have you not seen how hard a sacrifice this is to me? how it compels me to act contrary to myself?"

"I know you, Alice," replied Arthur; "but I know also that Altenberg has only come here on your

account,—that he loves you. And will not your heart return his love? He is rich and influential."

"Never, never!" exclaimed Alice. "You surely know what I think of him."

"Alice, if you are telling the truth;" cried Arthur, clasping her right hand firmly between his own; "if my heart could still hope to win yours!"

Alice was silent: her hand trembled in his.

"I have loved you from the day when I first saw you," continued Arthur. "You have been my only thought through all these years; of you have I dreamed; on you have rested all my hopes and plans for the future. I have never reflected that I could only offer you a simple life; but I have been conscious that my heart was filled with unutterable love for you."

Alice was still silent. Had Arthur been able to look into her eyes, he would have seen what was passing in her mind.

"And have you no word for me?" he asked.

Then she threw herself into his arms, whispering, "Do you not then know that my heart has long been yours? that I love you more fervently than you can ever love me."

Arthur embraced her exultantly.

"Mine, mine!" he cried, kissing her lips and cheeks. "Alice, say once more that you love me, that you will be mine; for these words make me tremble with joy and rapture."

"I love you; I wish to belong to you alone," whispered Alice.

Those moments were full of the purest, most blissful happiness.

"Do you still wish to go away?" Alice at length asked in a sportive tone.

"Yes, let me go," answered Arthur. "I could not conceal the happiness which fills my heart; nor could I bear to see that hateful Altenberg talking with you, trying to win your love. My excitement would make me capable of any deed to drive him from your side; and I do not wish to reward your father's hospitality in such a way. Now I depart peaceful and happy: for I know that your heart cannot lie; it will remain true to me, though hundreds of miles lay between us."

"It shall remain true to you," said Alice assuringly; "but must I count the enjoyment of our happiness by minutes, and not even by hours?"

"Alice, the remembrance and the certainty of our love remains to us. I am satisfied with that, because I had deemed you lost forever. I cannot live any longer under the same roof with Altenberg. Once already we have met in a hostile spirit: the same thing would happen again, and then arms alone could make peace between us. I do not wish to hazard my life after such happiness has been granted to me."

Steps were heard approaching.

Once more Alice embraced her lover, and then hurried away in the darkness.

Arthur remained sitting, as if intoxicated with happiness. He

passed his hand over his brow to convince himself that he was really awake; that all had not been a beautiful, blessed dream. He was awake. He felt still the pressure of her little hand, the breath from her lips; and his heart beat so loud and fiercely, that he was obliged to press his hand upon it to still its throbbing.

He staid one day longer at his uncle's house, and then took his leave.

The baron walked back and forth in his library in a state of extreme satisfaction. Arthur's departure had relieved him from a double anxiety: he was convinced that the influence which his nephew had exerted on Alice's heart was now at an end, for he had not the slightest suspicion of what had passed between them. Had Arthur remained longer, a hostile encounter with the captain could hardly have been avoided, since the young men hated each other bitterly.

Elka was persuaded that Alice would now lend a willing ear to the captain; and in his mind the object of his desires seemed already reached. He smoked his cigar comfortably; and then, throwing himself into an arm-chair, settled quietly down to the enjoyment of a leisure hour.

His little room was fitted up luxuriously. The carpet was so soft, that not a footstep could be heard; heavy curtains almost shut out the light; cases were filled with books and papers; and by the window stood a skilfully-carved writ-

ing-desk. Every pen, every piece of paper, in this desk, was in the most perfect order : it almost looked as if it were kept for ornament, and only rarely used, though Elka worked at it many hours, — often far into the night. But he was accustomed to preserve the most painful order. A letter pushed out of place would affect him unpleasantly.

After a while, he rose to betake himself to his writing-desk. First, however, he stepped to a table on which stood a valuable casket of wrought steel, inlaid with ivory. From the watch-chain on his breast, he then detached a small key, skillfully wrought, and placed it in the casket ; and, at a slight pressure, the lid opened.

The baron stooped to take a paper from the casket, but started back in alarm ; for the unusual disorder of its contents did not escape his eye. He seldom lost his composure ; but his hand now trembled slightly : still he compelled himself to be calm, thinking he must be mistaken. No one but himself could open this casket, which contained his most valuable papers and despatches. He searched for a despatch that he had received a few days before, which was of the greatest importance : he did not find it. At the same time, he missed the key to the cipher in which the despatch was written.

The blood forsook his face : he stood upright, struggling for breath ; for a heavy weight seemed to lie upon his breast. He could not yet believe the despatch was really

gone ; but the thought of it tortured him, for it was of infinite importance to him.

By a violent effort he collected all his powers, and forced himself into a state of tranquillity. He searched the casket carefully, looking at every piece of paper with an attentive eye, — in vain. He did not find the missing despatch, nor the key to it ; though he knew with the most perfect certainty that he had put them both in the casket for safe-keeping.

The sweat of anguish started to his brow : he threw himself into a chair, exhausted. If both had been stolen, the end of the affair was more than he could see : he only knew that the consequences to himself would be severe and inevitable.

He examined the lock of the casket ; but it showed not the slightest trace of violence, and the key fastened it as easily as ever. But one explanation was possible : the despatch and the key had been stolen from him, although he could not understand the possibility of such a thing. In vain he pondered, trying to think of some person on whom suspicion might rest. His servants were all tried and faithful ; they had been in his service for years : and what interest could they have in stealing a despatch whose importance they had no means of knowing !

All his meditations led to one result. He roused himself, rang for his servant, and ordered a carriage. Without delay, he went

to the chief of police, and in a few words told him what had happened.

"The despatch is of the greatest value to me," he added; "but it is equally important for me to keep the theft an entire secret. Is it possible to institute inquiries, and at the same time to pay the strictest regard to this consideration? I shall be grateful for every effort of the police."

The chief of police met him in the most affable manner.

"I will send you a man in whom you can place implicit confidence," he replied. "If it is possible to discover the perpetrator of this theft, he will succeed in doing it; and I pledge myself for his silence. Allow me only to draw your attention to a single fact. The man is invaluable to us; he is a genius in his profession; but his obstinacy is unyielding. Grant, as far as possible, every one of his requests, though they may seem to you mere whims; then you may rely fully upon his conscientiousness and his zeal. He will allow himself no rest until his object is reached. Suffer him to go on quietly, even though he may appear to have lost sight entirely of the object in view. He is remarkably sensitive; and one must pardon this little weakness in him for the sake of his ability."

Elka gladly assured the chief that he was willing to follow his advice. He was somewhat relieved by the confidence with which a successful result was predicted; but the feeling vanished when he remembered that the despatch might

already be in other hands, and that the newspapers might, perhaps, report its contents on the following day.

What good would it then do him if the thief were discovered! He was indifferent as to the punishment of the criminal: his thoughts were only for his own interests. If the contents of this despatch were known, or the theft discovered, his position as ambassador would be endangered; and more than one ambitious plan would thus be overthrown: he would then be undone.

He returned home, and waited impatiently for the arrival of the police-officer. He had retired to his library, where he might be secure from interruption. The servant at length announced a man who wished to speak to him.

"Who is it?" he asked impatiently.

"He did not mention his name," replied the servant.

The baron was about to refuse to see him, when he remembered that it might be the expected police-officer.

"Show him in here," he ordered. A few minutes afterwards, a man some thirty years old, insignificant in appearance, and yet almost elegant in his build, entered the little room. Elka's eye ran over him inquiringly; but nothing about him betrayed such a person as the chief of police had described to him.

The man's face was pale and expressionless; his eyes looked faded; his movements were clumsy rather than quick.

Elka rose reluctantly, thinking his expectations had been disappointed ; when the man introduced himself as the police-commissioner Green, adding, that he had come at the special command of the chief of police, though he had not yet the slightest suspicion on what business he was to be employed.

The baron's disappointment did not entirely vanish even now, because he had pictured to himself a very different person as the man whom the chief of police recommended so warmly, whose ability he had so highly praised ; nevertheless, he received him with the greatest politeness, and urged him to take a seat. The commissioner seated himself without constraint ; and Elka informed him of what had taken place.

Green scarcely seemed to hear him : his right hand played with his watch-chain, while his eye surveyed the various objects in the room with a look of curiosity rather than of inquiry.

"When did you miss the papers ?" he asked.

"This morning."

"And when did you last see them in the casket ?"

"Two days ago."

"Have you not opened the casket during that time ?"

"No."

"And you know with absolute certainty that the papers were still in the casket when you opened it the last time ?"

"I know it with absolute certainty. The despatch was of the

greatest value to me : therefore I gave special attention to it."

"Who possesses the key to the casket ?"

"I myself. I always carry it with me, here on my watch-chain."

"And at night ?"

"The watch and the key lie under my pillow."

"You must allow me to question you on the most trifling points, otherwise it will be impossible for me to form a clear idea of the transaction. Where do you leave the watch while you are dressing ?"

"During that time, it hangs on the wall, near the wash-stand."

"Do you dress without assistance ?"

"My servant assists me ; but he is thoroughly faithful and reliable. He has been in my service for years ; and I think I can pledge myself for his innocence."

A faint smile stole over the expressionless face of the commissary.

"Herr Baron, I would never undertake to pledge myself for any man, not even for my brother," he observed. "In this case, however, it is of no importance ; for I must hereafter be allowed to form my own opinion concerning each individual ; now I would like merely to make inquiry as to the facts, by way of preliminary. You are convinced, then, that no one can get possession of the key, even for a few minutes ?"

"That is impossible."

Green bowed, as if he agreed entirely with this declaration.

"Who has access to this room?" he asked.

"My servant alone, during my absence."

"The same one who helps you dress?"

"The same."

"Do you require his assistance at night, in undressing?"

"Sometimes; but, on the whole, very rarely."

"Can you remember whether you have claimed his services of late, in undressing?"

"I have undressed myself alone," replied Elka impatiently, indignant at the painful minuteness with which the commissary examined him.

This did not escape Green's attention.

"The chief of police has informed me that the paper was of extraordinary importance to you, and that you wished the theft to remain an entire secret," said he: "therefore I can direct my questions to you alone, since, of course, I can make no inquiries of your servants. For this reason, I must ask you to be patient a short time longer. Do you lock this room regularly at night?"

"Regularly. I even do it when I draw the bolt also. This door, here, leads into my sleeping-room. No one, therefore, could enter this room without coming through my chamber."

"Do you burn a light at night?"

"Regularly."

"Will you now permit me to examine the casket?"

He rose and approached it.

"I am familiar with caskets of this kind," he continued, lifting it for closer inspection. "They are neatly and substantially made,—really the work is exquisite! Each one is a little masterpiece. Pray, may I ask you for the key?"

Elka handed it to him.

Green locked and unlocked the casket in a dexterous manner: he repeated the process, listening to the snap of the spring. Once more he examined it attentively.

"The casket has only been opened by this key," he then said in a decided tone.

"Are you sure of that?" said Elka.

"I am," answered Green. "I understand these locks, and know something about locks in general, because I learned the trade of a locksmith in my youth. These locks are very substantial, but at the same time so delicate and complicated, that it is impossible to open them with a duplicate key, without injuring them; and this lock has not been injured: the key would not turn so easily if it had been; the spring would have lost its sound. Still less has force been employed: do you think that would be possible, without injuring this delicate polish, or leaving the slightest mark of violence?"

"There are very skilful thieves," observed the baron.

A scornful smile flashed over the commissary's face.

"Herr Baron, I know the skill of thieves too well not to give full credit to the ability of individuals; but all skill has its bounds, and

those bounds I know. This casket has not been opened by force or by a duplicate key."

"And how will you explain the disappearance of the papers, which is an undeniable fact?" interrupted Elka.

The commissary shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot explain it yet. If I knew how the theft has been accomplished, but little effort would be needed to discover the criminal."

"Have you not even a suspicion?"

"Not yet. It would be over-hasty to entertain such a feeling already. Have you missed nothing besides the despatch and the key?"

"Nothing. Several important papers and some very valuable diamonds are in the casket: not one of them is missing."

"The thief, then, cared for nothing but the despatch. He must have known about it, and learned where you kept it."

"No one but myself knew about the despatch," said Elka.

"May I ask you to tell me the contents of the despatch?"

"Impossible!" cried the baron.

"Remember that I am an officer; and the deepest silence is doubly a duty for me. Moreover, I am not one of those who are weak enough to betray secrets."

Elka hesitated.

"It is impossible, Herr Commissary!" he exclaimed at length. Pray do not consider this an evidence of distrust. This is not my secret, but that of my government."

"You do not yet understand me aright, Herr Baron," continued Green. "I do not wish to learn the contents of the despatch: I frankly confess that I am too little of a politician to take special interest in such things; I only wish to know which party has conveyed instruction through this despatch in order that I may infer from that who would be chiefly interested in learning its contents, or getting possession of it. You will understand that this is of the greatest importance in my work."

The baron paced up and down the room. He saw how reasonable the commissioner's request was; but he did not yet know how he could satisfy him without betraying more than he wished to do.

"The government would naturally take the greatest interest in the despatch," he at length said. "Should the contents be known, I am convinced that the democratic and orthodox party would be specially interested therein. Unfortunately, I cannot explain this seeming contradiction, because I should thus betray more than I am at liberty to tell. Does this intimation satisfy you?"

"It must satisfy me, since you can tell me no more. Now I have one more particular request to make. Will you allow me to take up my abode in your house for a while, in a character which will excite as little attention as possible?"

"With pleasure; only I do not know under what character that would be possible."

"No one but yourself must know

that I am a police-commissioner, no one must even suspect it. It would best suit my ability and inclination if you would engage me as your private secretary, — as a mere pretence, of course."

"I agree to that," replied Elka. "You hope, then, to clear up this mystery of the missing despatch?"

"Herr Baron, never since I have been police-commissioner have I entered upon a case without a hope, without firm confidence even, that I should succeed in discovering the criminal; and perhaps to this very confidence I owe it, that my hopes have seldom deceived me. Allow me once more to repeat, that it is of the utmost importance that no one in the house shall suspect my character, or the object of my presence. I beg you, therefore, to treat me just as if I were really your private secretary: by no means pay me any greater attention, for you would only betray me in that way. Reprove me in the presence of your servant, if I do not suit you: put work upon me without hesitation; for everybody will know that you do not engage a private secretary for his own pleasure."

"My part will be infinitely more difficult than yours," observed Elka.

"You will succeed in carrying it out as soon as you set aside every thought of politeness and consideration," replied Green with a smile. "Permit me now to ask you a few more questions. Who knew that you had received this despatch?"

"No one knows its contents:

moreover, I receive despatches almost every day."

"Did any one know that you had received a despatch of special importance?"

The baron reflected.

"I doubt it; but still I will not deny the possibility that I may have betrayed the fact by some look or expression."

"The despatch has been in your hands but a short time?"

"Only three days."

"Well, I will not claim your patience any longer now, Herr Baron. I shall make acquaintance for myself with the occupants of this house. One thing more: who knows of the disappearance of the papers?"

"No one except the chief of police, you, and myself."

"I am very glad of that. Speak of it to no one for the present: you will thus lighten my task."

"And when do you wish to enter upon your duties as secretary?" inquired Elka, smiling.

"As soon as possible, this very day; yes, at once."

"This depends entirely upon your own wishes. Well, we will at once assume our characters. Will you retain your name?"

"Yes, indeed! Green is such an innocent name, that it is almost too harmless, even for a private secretary."

The baron rang for his servant, informed him that he had engaged Green as his private secretary, and directed him to show the gentleman to his room.

"I will give you more particular

instructions as to your duties at another time," he added, turning to Green, and then stepped to his writing-desk, without giving himself any further trouble about him.

The servant, George, looked at the new secretary with any thing but friendly eyes. He had at first taken him for a very different person, and met him with much greater politeness than a secretary could claim, in his opinion. He thought his own dignity had suffered somewhat, and was especially vexed that Green did not at once take him into his confidence: so he tried to restore the balance of politeness by showing too little now.

"In here!" said he, opening the door of the secretary's room. "The room is far too handsome; but the baron has ordered it: I should have selected another."

Green was amused at the servant's demeanor, but saw that he must impose some bounds upon him from the beginning. He had seen through the character of this man at the first glance, and perceived that he should never need his assistance. Incorruptible honesty and fidelity were unmistakably seen in George's eyes; but, at the same time, they indicated such narrowness of intellect as Nature bestows upon few mortals. But, with his fine livery, the devil of pride had entered into George. The baron could trust many things to his honest stupidity, without fear; and George, therefore, considered himself the chosen confidant of his master. He naturally as-

cribed this to his own wise head; for, as is the case with so many blockheads, he deemed himself remarkably clever.

"Hearken, friend," said Green: "I think we shall get along better together, if we mutually respect our positions, and measure our courtesy accordingly. I shall conduct the baron's correspondence. You help him dress, and clean his clothes. Now, I am convinced that the cleaning of clothes is a very important business, and demands experience; for every man does not understand how to brush a coat well. I impute this skill to you beforehand, and shall therefore always treat you with requisite respect; but I claim the same from you, especially as it is much more difficult to conduct a correspondence than to brush a coat."

George looked at him with wide-open mouth. He had not fully understood his remarks; but they impressed him with a feeling of awe, and that vexed him, because he did not wish to be so impressed by a man who had not been in the baron's service an hour.

He was silent a moment, trying to think of some suitable evasion of the subject; but his dull, heavy brain could not succeed in doing this so quickly.

"In here, I say!" he cried. "I respect no one but the baron and his family. If the room does not suit you, you may remain standing outside the door for aught I care. I have obeyed the order given to me; and now we have done with each other."

He was about to go away with these words.

"Stop, friend!" exclaimed Green, who saw that he should not succeed in this way with the stupid, stubborn servant. "It will be best for us both if we treat each other in a peaceable manner. Your own sense must tell you this; for our interests are more or less the same."

George looked at the new secretary again with wondering eyes, but did not understand his words. He hesitated a moment, and then, turning his back upon him with a contemptuous look, went away.

Green entered the room pointed out to him. It was a cheerful apartment, with windows overlooking the garden, which afforded a remarkably pleasant view. He stood at the window a few minutes, letting his eye wander over the large green plots of grass, and the groups of trees set out so tastefully. He thought how delightful it would be, in such a place as this, to devote a long time to the rest which his position so rarely allowed him to enjoy. Only too often did his duties lead him to the most disreputable places to search for some trace of criminals; for almost every difficult case which defied the efforts of his colleagues, was intrusted to him. His only reward consisted in this, that he seldom failed in a task which he took upon himself. He pursued it, indeed, with unwearied zeal, lived for that alone, and suffered no other interests to compete with it.

He soon withdrew from the window, therefore, however much he

enjoyed the pleasant view of the garden, threw himself into a chair, and directed his thoughts with all keenness to the new task which had been appointed for him. He had not yet the slightest point on which to ground a plan of action. But for the baron's positive statement, the conjecture would have forced itself upon him, that a crime was not here in question, but only an oversight on the part of the baron: he would have believed that Elka himself had mislaid the papers.

Certainly the baron was not a person whom one could suspect of such an oversight. A keen mind shone unmistakably in his eyes.

All the circumstances connected with the disappearance of the papers indicated that the deed was performed with the greatest caution and craftiness.

One thing was undoubtedly established in his mind, that the casket had only been opened with the baron's key. The supposition that it was opened by force was necessarily abandoned, since that would be impossible, without leaving some mark of violence. It was equally certain that a duplicate key had not been used. He knew well the delicate and complicated construction of the lock, and that it must have been for days in very skilful hands, if a duplicate key had been manufactured; and, according to the assurances of the baron, this would have been impossible.

One point was clear to him: the papers could only have been stolen by a person in the baron's immedi-

ate vicinity, who had gained possession of his key; but he thought he could also assume that this person had only acted under the orders of another.

According to the intimations of the baron, the despatch touched upon highly important political interests, and he must naturally look in very different circles for those who were chiefly concerned in it. His first task, therefore, must be to become acquainted with all the persons around the baron, and inquire into their connections, — not a very easy undertaking, especially as it would, in all probability, require a long time.

The only person whom he had yet seen, the servant George, it was unnecessary to question; for he was too narrow-minded, as well as too honest, to be employed on such a deed.

When Green had fully decided this point in his own mind, he again rose, and walked to the window. He drummed upon the window-pane, and looked down into garden, without taking the same interest in the lovely view; for the thoughts which had just been employing him were still actively at work, seeking, almost by force, to penetrate the mystery.

He saw Capt. von Altenberg and Alice walking in the garden; but he did not know them, only suspecting that Alice was the baron's daughter. He left his room, in order to make himself familiar, in a quiet way, with the house and its occupants.

In the evening, the baron went

to the theatre with Altenberg. He was surprised that he did not find his coachman at the end of the evening, for he knew his usual punctuality. He was obliged to wait until the man drove up at a brisk trot; when the baron angrily reproved him for the delay.

"The new secretary is to blame for it," said the coachman in excuse.

"My secretary?" asked Elka in astonishment. "How is that possible?"

"He has been telling such wild and entertaining stories, that I have let the time slip away."

With difficulty Elka concealed a smile as he entered the carriage.

When he reached home, he heard loud and merry laughter from the servants' room. George came out quickly; and, through the open door, the baron saw Green in the midst of the servants.

George lighted his master to his room; while the captain immediately entered the dining-hall, where the ladies were waiting for him.

"You are having a jolly time down stairs," remarked the baron, turning to George.

The new secretary is turning all their heads," answered George.

"In what way?" pursued the baron.

"I have never seen a man so full of tricks and drollery. He seems to have studied them; for an honest man cannot keep such nonsense in his mind.

"Well, do you not consider him honest?" asked Elka with a smile.

"You also seemed to listen to him with pleasure."

"He is a braggart," replied George. "I laughed at him, indeed; but I do not trust him. He looks so simple; but he talks everybody to death. I only hope he can work as well as he tells stories."

"You may trust him confidently," observed the baron. "He is recommended by such a reliable person, that I have not the least doubt of his ability. For this reason alone I have taken him into my service; for at present I shall have very little occupation for him: so he may continue to amuse you for a while."

"I desire to have nothing to do with him, because I consider him a braggart," remarked George, half-aside; for he was vexed that Green had so soon won the approval and confidence of his companions.

The servants were all occupied after the baron's return; and Green went out into the garden to enjoy the beautiful evening in the open air. It was so quiet there, with no sound save the gentle rustling of the tree-tops; and refreshing fragrance was wafted to him from the flower-beds.

He threw himself on a seat in one of the avenues. Here he would be even more undisturbed than in his own room, and could quietly reflect upon the impression made by the servants with whom he had just become acquainted.

Besides George, and a second servant Henry, he had met the

cook, the coachman, and the groom; but none of these men seemed to him fitted to undertake a deed which had been so skilfully performed.

By the test of their interest in the various anecdotes and comical stories which he had told, he guessed at their dispositions. The cook was evidently the slyest of them all. His talents qualified him fully for a villain; but he was far too hasty and awkward for such a deed. He would either have stolen the entire casket, or have broken it open by force.

"If he ever becomes a criminal, he will be distinguished for violence and fearlessness," said Green to himself; "but a certain degree of delicacy he will never attain."

The servant Henry was a timid little man. His honesty was not specially to be trusted, in the commissary's opinion. He could steal a few groschen a day from his master, without any pangs of conscience, but would not have the courage to take a ten-thaler bill from him.

"He has learned his morality in the kitchen," thought Green. "He respects a silver spoon because it is worth several thalers, but feels at liberty to steal from every dish."

The groom was a jolly fellow, over head and ears in love, light-minded also, but honest. Green was most pleased with the coachman, a large man, whose thirst was unquenchable. His nature was rough, his character strongly marked, his opinion decided; and, if he had no reason for his opinion,

still he was always ready to defend it very emphatically with his fist. Experience had proved to him that he could prevail much better in this way than by using any arguments or reasons. Moreover, during the long years he had spent in the care of horses, he had partaken somewhat of their nature: he was faithful to the master who fed him, and would have driven him fearlessly through thick and thin.

Not one of all these men had any thing to do with the theft. Green almost repented of having devoted a whole evening to them; besides, the coachman had drunk his health so many times in the grog he had himself brewed, that his head was dizzy from his unusual libations.

Of the women-servants he had only had a glimpse; but they seemed to him far more dangerous than the men, — especially a chambermaid in attendance upon the baroness, whose dark, piercing eyes had struck him at once. The captain, also, had a servant, — a man who pleased Green less than any of the others; who had avoided him, thus far, unmistakably by intention, as if he suspected that he had not a secretary to deal with. This man's eye had a wary, lurking expression. He tried, indeed, to put on a look of perfect innocence, and perhaps he might thus deceive everybody: but the commissary he could not deceive; for his eye was sharpened by too long and too many experiences.

“If this man is not a sharper,”

said Green to himself, “then all my experience deceives me. He has been here a few days with the captain; but still he avoids a nearer acquaintance with the other servants, and seems to be somewhat known in the city.”

Green finally rose, and walked slowly through the garden. He had no desire to betake himself to rest, because he had not yet a feeling of weariness. All around was still. The rattling of carriages was heard from the city; but it sounded far away, and only made the quiet garden more agreeable by contrast. While he was walking near the wall surrounding the garden, he saw some one leap lightly over it. He could not recognize the figure; but he followed it carefully. With rapid, unhesitating steps it hurried on, and finally turned into the avenue in whose shade Green had, a few minutes before, been sitting; and on the same bench the figure now sat.

Concealed behind a tree near by, Green resolved to await further developments. He suspected that this was to be a meeting of two lovers; but even that was not without interest to him, as it was his immediate task to become acquainted with the relations and connections of every member of the household.

He was not mistaken in his supposition. In a short time, the rustle of a dress was heard, the form of a woman passed by him; but he could not distinguish her features because a heavy veil was thrown over her head.

Green was not near enough to follow the conversation of the lovers; but he heard the name of Alice several times, and was soon convinced that the lady was the baron's daughter.

But who was the man whom she was meeting secretly at that late hour? He knew that adventures of this kind were by no means unusual in the higher circles; but he was particularly interested in the present one, because this mystery might perhaps lead him nearer to his own object.

While reflecting thus, he suddenly heard light steps close beside him. He stood motionless, concealed by the trunk of the tree. At a short distance from himself, he saw a man in a crouching attitude, half creeping towards the bench on which the unsuspecting lovers were sitting.

Green's interest was now increased to the highest point. Who was this second listener? His noiseless step, his serpent-like motions, plainly betrayed that he was not playing the listener for the first time. He had now crept so near the bench, that he must be able to understand the conversation of the lovers. There he sat, cowered down, for a long time.

In vain did Green try to distinguish this man's face: he could not even form a guess from his figure, because he had glided by him in a stooping attitude, and still sat cowering down. Soon afterwards he went away, cautious and gentle as a cat in his movements.

The commissary was in doubt whether he ought to follow him: but he might thus lose track of the man who was sitting with the baron's daughter: and it seemed to him more important, just now, to learn who he was.

A long time still he waited, motionless, until the lovers finally separated. They appointed another meeting in the same place, the time for which escaped Green's ear.

Swiftly the young man retraced his steps to the wall, while Green followed him in the shadow of the trees and shrubs. Swinging himself over the wall, he took the way to the city, closely followed still by the commissary.

When they arrived at the gates of the city, Green was able to distinguish the man he was pursuing, and saw that he was young, and well dressed. He followed him at the distance of a few paces, and, as they passed a bright gas-light, he gave a loud cough. As he expected, the young man before him turned round; and he looked into a handsome but unfamiliar face.

In order to awaken no suspicion, he fell still farther behind, but without losing sight of his man for a moment. He followed him through several streets, until the stranger finally entered a house, and locked the door behind him.

Green stationed himself opposite the house. In a few minutes, he saw a light through some windows in the second story, and plainly recognized the form of the young man in the room.

He lived there, then. He no-

ticed the number of the house, and then, entirely satisfied with the result of his search, returned to the baron's villa, softly whistling an opera air to himself.

The porter angrily opened the door for him, muttering something about a dissolute life.

Green pressed a piece of money into his hand.

"Say nothing to the baron about it," he begged. "When a man is busy all day, he likes to enjoy himself in the evening. Ha, ha! It is folly to assume that night is only for sleep: life is never more jovial than then. One single night is worth more to me than three days. Now, good-night. I am convinced that we shall yet become the best friends."

The porter did not share this conviction; but he kept the piece of money in his hand, turned the key, and silently returned to his little room.

Early the next morning, Green betook himself to the house which the stranger had entered the evening before. He had particularly noticed the windows, and mounted the stairs without making any inquiries. He found no plate on the door of the room. However disagreeable it was to him, he was forced to apply to the landlord in order to learn more about the stranger. He met the landlady, and, with the most innocent air, asked for lodgings.

She regretted that she could not accommodate him; but the only room which she had to let was oc-

cupied by a young gentleman two days ago.

"What is his name?" asked Green with the greatest indifference apparently.

"Von Walter," replied the woman.

Green listened attentively. He knew that a nephew of the baron, named Walter, had been visiting him, and had left two days before.

"I know one Herr von Walter," he observed. "Perhaps this is the one. Can you tell me his Christian name?"

The woman looked for a card; which she at length found, and handed to him.

Green was obliged to exert all his powers to conceal his joyful surprise; for on the card he read, "Arthur von Walter."

"No: that is not the man I know," said he, returning the card. "For how long a time has the gentleman engaged the room?"

The woman could not answer this question; and Green soon took his departure. Various thoughts and suppositions arose in his mind. Arthur had left his uncle's house with the announcement that he was going on a journey. On the following morning, the baron had missed his papers, and in the evening the young man had a secret interview with his cousin: here, therefore, was there a decided mystery. Could it have any connection with the loss of the despatch? Something more than a mere love-affair seemed to lie before him.

Without delay, he went to the police-office, and instructed an offi-

cer to watch Arthur in the strictest manner,—to follow him when he went out, and to notice carefully the persons with whom he had intercourse.

“No one must suspect that you are watching him,” he added. “Choose, therefore, some disguise. The gentleman will probably make use of a carriage when he leaves the house in the daytime: if so, you must immediately take a cab, and follow him. It is of great importance for me to learn with whom he has dealings. You will report to me early to-morrow morning.”

Having given these directions, Green slowly returned to the villa.

Who could the man be that had stolen like a spy upon the lovers? He had not yet a suspicion. His task seemed to have become remarkably difficult. If the baron's daughter were implicated in the mystery, he must use the greatest circumspection in order to shield her. He had experience enough to know how poorly excessive zeal is rewarded in such cases.

The police are obliged to drop many an examination, because persons are thereby touched who must be spared.

When Green reached the villa, the baron was awaiting him with the greatest impatience. George received him with malicious pleasure.

“The baron has inquired for you several times,” said he. “No one knew where you were; only the porter said you came home late at night.”

Green did not seem to notice the servant's malicious look.

“I was obliged to go into the city,” he answered shortly.

“In your master's interests?” asked George.

“On that point I owe an account to the baron alone.”

“Well, I suspect he will demand it,” added George.

Green went at once to the baron's room. Elka received him with evident excitement, and locked the door behind him.

“Herr Commissary, I have been robbed again,” said he. “Two more despatches have disappeared from the casket. They are of small importance, indeed; but I am in a state of feverish excitement in consequence of this new theft. The incomprehensible manner in which it has been committed tortures me. I no longer feel secure in my own room.”

Green was no less astonished. He also was puzzled.

“When did you discover the theft?” he asked.

“This morning,—about an hour ago,” answered Elka, restlessly pacing up and down the room.

“And when did you last see the despatches in the casket?” continued the commissary.

“Yesterday afternoon.”

“Who has been in the room during that time?”

“No one but George.”

“Are you sure of this, Herr Baron?”

“I gave George strict orders yesterday to admit no one to my room during my absence; and he obeys

my orders in the most conscientious manner."

"Would he not have allowed your wife and daughter to enter the room?"

Elka stood still, looking at Green with astonishment.

"Why do you ask, Herr Commissary? I must confess that I do not understand it. Allow me to hope that your suspicion" —

He did not finish the sentence.

The commissary remained perfectly calm.

"Pray, Herr Baron, do not misunderstand my question," he said. "I only wished to know how far your order extended, and in what sense George would understand it."

"Of course, I give no commands to my servant respecting my wife and daughter," Elka replied somewhat more composedly. "Moreover, they very seldom come here, and I know not what they could want during my absence."

"Herr Baron, that is a matter of entire indifference. At all events, would George have so understood your order, that he would refuse admittance either to Henry, or any of the women-servants?"

"Naturally," answered Elka shortly.

"Has the casket stood in the same place?" continued Green.

"Yes. I was not afraid that the theft would be repeated. For the future, I shall lock it up in my secretary."

The commissary examined the casket once more with the greatest care.

"It shows not the slightest trace of having been opened by force, or by an unskilful hand," he said as he set it down. "Did you notice any change in the lock when you opened the casket?"

"Not the slightest."

"Pray allow me to take the key."

The baron handed it to him; and again he tried the lock with the utmost care, examined the key closely, and then shook his head because he could find no solution of the mystery.

"Has the casket been in your possession long?"

"For years."

"When you bought it, did you receive two keys?"

"Only one."

"And you have kept this key with you constantly since yesterday?"

"Yes, indeed! Not a moment has it left me: during the night, it was under my pillow, as usual; but, when I arose this morning, I put it on immediately."

"Has any thing ever been stolen before from the casket?"

"No."

The commissary was silent a moment, reflecting.

"Herr Baron, I insist that the casket has been opened with this key."

"How is that possible?"

"That is the mystery before us; but I doubt not we shall succeed in clearing it up."

"Did you arrive at any result yesterday, entertain any suspicion?" asked Elka. "You have become acquainted with my serv-

ants, and, as it seems, entirely captivated them."

Green laughed.

"Except George," he replied. "Thus far, I have only gained the conviction that none of your servants committed the theft."

"I am very glad of that, and can therefore rely on the fidelity of my servants," cried Elka.

"Pray, Herr Baron, do not give this meaning to my words," interrupted the commissary. "I would not pledge myself for one of them, except George and the coachman."

"And yet you are convinced of their innocence?"

"In this instance," remarked Green, "because I do not give them credit for sufficient skill or cunning."

"You make the disappearance of the papers still more mysterious to me," cried Elka. "Where do you suppose the thief is, if not among my servants?"

Green shrugged his shoulders half evasively.

"I have not yet been able to entertain any decided suspicion. Besides, there are servant-women also in your house; but, thus far, I have had no opportunity to become acquainted with them."

"Then you stand just where you were yesterday morning," interposed Elka impatiently.

"Not quite, Herr Baron," replied Green with a sharp accent. "I think I have gained something in the conviction that your servants have had nothing to do with the crime, if crime there has been ;

and perhaps another would have been more fortunate in my place, for we have to trust somewhat to fortune in our inquiries."

Elka felt that his words had offended Green.

"Herr Commissary," said he, "no reproof must be inferred from my words; but you would perfectly understand my uneasiness and impatience if you knew how infinitely important it is that I should speedily discover the thief, and recover the despatch. I would gladly pay you any price you may demand, if you could lay the despatch before me, unhurt and unread."

"The satisfaction of having rendered you such a service will be sufficient for me," Green courteously replied. "I can indeed promise you to discover the thief; but I cannot yet even give you a hope that this will be done soon. Chance or luck may lead me into the right track to-day; but I never build on such uncertain foundations, and much less would I give you any assurances based upon them. Have you informed any one of the present loss?"

"No one but yourself."

"Then pray keep silent concerning it. Now, one more question. Do you place a special value upon the casket? I mean, would it trouble you if it were rendered useless for a while?"

"Not in the least, if the discovery of the thief were hastened thereby."

"Very well. Then may I ask you to remove the papers which are most valuable, and which you

will be obliged to use within a few days?"

The baron silently did as he was requested.

"Now, pray allow me to take the key." He took a bit of wax from a candle, kneaded it into a little ball, and pushed it carefully into the hollow of the key.

The baron looked at him in amazement.

"You certainly cannot use the key now, for a few days," said Green. "Perhaps the mysterious thief will pay a third visit to the casket; and then we shall at least learn whether he has used your key or not: it is quite possible that the lock will be destroyed."

Elka now understood the plan, and agreed to it fully. He was thrown into consternation by this second loss. These despatches, also, were not intended for publicity; and yet he was confident that the thief would make use of them. His position as ambassador was greatly endangered; his very honor was at stake. In addition to this cause of anxiety, he was disturbed by Alice's coolness towards the captain, which must, of necessity, repel him, while it overthrew the hopes of her father.

Altenberg had intimated, the day before, that he had expected greater affability from Alice; and the ill temper, which he could not conceal, plainly betrayed that he felt offended.

As soon as the commissary took his leave, the baron went to his wife's room. He found her taking her coffee. She hastened towards

him, holding out her hand, which he took with an absent air.

"Where is Alice?" he asked.

"She is still asleep," answered the baroness.

Elka looked at his watch, and then silently seated himself by the side of his wife.

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Oscar, you seem to be very much out of tune," she finally said.

A bitter smile passed over the baron's face.

"Do you doubt that I have reason to be so?" he replied. "I have explained to you why I desired Alice to meet Altenberg in a friendly manner; I begged you to exercise all your influence to this end: but, thus far, I have not observed that the slightest regard has been paid to my wishes. Do you expect that I shall be cheerful under the circumstances? All my politeness and devotion cannot compensate for the impression which Alice has made upon the captain."

"Elka, you do me injustice," interrupted the baroness. "I spoke to Alice yesterday; but she has a decided aversion to Altenberg, and expressed it freely."

"And you suffered her to express it," observed the baron.

"Could I prevent it? I have exerted all my influence. She knows that Altenberg is trying to win her heart: her endeavor, therefore, seems to be to repulse him. I am more than ever convinced that she loves Arthur."

The baron sprang up in excitement.

"Send for Alice!" he exclaimed. "I will tell her myself what I demand from her as a duty; and I will see if she ventures to act contrary to my wishes."

"Oscar, you are excited," broke in the baroness, not without anxiety, as she noticed the dark frown upon her husband's brow. "I am afraid you will be too harsh with Alice."

"You have yourself confessed that you have accomplished nothing by mildness."

"Do you know so little of love as not to understand that it grows by opposition? Give Alice's heart time to forget Arthur; and then, perhaps, she will listen more willingly to Altenberg."

Elka paced up and down the room. He seemed to be reflecting upon the words of his wife.

"I have not time to wait for that," he cried. "I dare not conceal from you that all I possess will be at stake if Alice refuses Altenberg. I may even lose my position. I must have a decision in a few days, — before it is too late."

The baroness noticed with surprise her husband's feverish excitement. She had never seen him thus. He had always shown himself to be an experienced man of the world, and a diplomatist, who bore the most disagreeable things with a smile, and carefully concealed what was passing in his mind. She also rose in excitement.

"Oscar, how is that possible?" she inquired.

"Ask me not," he replied. "In Alice's hand lies your fate and mine."

Tell her this; add to it, that fate is against me, that my very honor is at stake, and that she alone can save me. I will see whether she will still refuse to make this sacrifice for me."

With these words, he left the room.

The baroness was about to hasten after him; but her strength failed her. His words and agitation had terrified her violently.

Her maid entered the room to assist her in dressing; but she sent her away because she felt the necessity of being alone.

Up to this time, her life had passed pleasantly, and she had never known anxiety or care. Were these now suddenly to approach her in stern reality? She would not yet believe it; and still she knew her husband too well to doubt his word.

She sat on the sofa, with her head resting upon her hand, trying to fathom the meaning of her husband's words; but she could not approach the truth. Her beautiful face seemed all at once to have grown old with care.

Alice stepped cheerfully into the room. Her face still sparkled with the joy of having been with her beloved on the previous evening. A sad smile passed over the face of the baroness. The hearty joy which shone from her daughter's eyes, she was to destroy. She could not make up her mind to do it: she would, at least, grant the unsuspecting girl a few more hours of happiness.

The commissary had repaired to the garden on leaving the baron. There he met the captain's servant,

Brender, by name, a person whose face was distinctly stamped as that of a knave. Brender might be about forty years old, a man of medium height and slender figure. His small, drooping eyes looked sharp, and yet timid, unobserving. They seemed unable to rest upon any object; but they possessed an extraordinary power of taking in every thing in a keen though rapid glance. His lips were thin and sharply cut, his nose pointed, his cheeks sunken.

In spite of all this, one would not have called the face ugly, had it not made an unpleasant impression by an almost continuous smile.

In this smile, the whole character of the man was betrayed, as it were. It was half sly, half embarrassed, and formed, to a certain extent, the mask which he put on in the presence of others in order to conceal what was passing within. The smile was intended not to win, but to deceive.

It had not been difficult for the commissary to guess at this man's character from his face: it was harder to establish any intercourse with him; for Brender possessed as much experience and cleverness as himself. He, too, had known life in its most varied forms, and never showed himself to be what he actually was. He never spoke a word which he had not carefully weighed beforehand; and nothing could have made him forget himself, even for a short time.

Green approached him quietly. He well knew how to strike the keynote of a seemingly indifferent but very agreeable conversation.

"Does this please you?" he asked.

"Particularly," answered Brender. "I like large cities."

"You have been here before?" observed Green, in such a positive tone, that Brender hesitated an instant before answering.

"I am here for the first time," he then replied.

The brief hesitation in answering this question convinced the commissary that Brender had been in the city before. He must, therefore, have some motive for concealing the truth. This confirmed him in his suspicions, and he continued:—

"Then I will offer myself to you as a guide. I was born in the city, and am familiar with the life of the present day. One can live better here than anywhere, if he only knows how. A merry life, a joyful death, is my principle. I am much mistaken in you, if you do not also like cheerful company.

"I do like it," replied Brender, half in assent, half in denial; "but, unfortunately, my time is very limited. You know, that, as a servant, I am dependent on my master."

"Ha, ha! I am dependent also," said Green; "but I am my own master at night, and then I live right merrily. I even assert that one can only be jolly during the night."

Brender had not yet overcome his distrust of the commissary.

"Have you been in the baron's service long?" he asked.

"Only a few days; but I know

the old porter. The man presses the hand warmly that drops a piece of money into his, and opens the door at any hour. The porter is the person of chief importance to me when I go into a new house. I do not really know any one else here,—not even the pretty maid of the baroness.”

He looked at Brender with a roguish side-glance as he spoke thus.

Brender laughed.

“She is not ugly,” he remarked.

“Ugly!” cried Green. “I have only met her once on the stairs: she is a charming creature! Those eyes! I fancied that I had become more calm; but I believe this little witch may be dangerous to me. The best principles go to the devil when one meets a girl with such eyes. Do not look so scornful, as if you were a woman-hater; for I am convinced that your heart beats very warmly.”

In spite of all his efforts, the commissary did not succeed in winning Brender’s confidence. He retained his reserve, and in the most skilful manner declined every offer to make him familiar with the pleasures of the city. Green, meanwhile, was convinced that he had an extremely crafty, skilful man to deal with, who frustrated every attempt to approach him,—a sufficient proof that he had much to conceal in his life.

He walked away decidedly out of humor. He foresaw that this man could throw many difficulties in his way, and that he should need time to overcome them: he

would rather sacrifice any thing than time, however, since he well understood the baron’s impatience to discover the thief. His own honor demanded that he should attain his object as quickly as possible; for the chief of police had intrusted this case to him with unusual earnestness.

There he stood helpless. By cautious observation alone would it perhaps be possible to discover a trace of the criminal. Never yet had he been brought into contact with a crime the execution of which seemed so unaccountable; where his sharp eye had not discovered even the slightest clew to the mystery.

Had not the baron’s excitement and consternation been too natural to warrant such a supposition, Green would have been forced to think that he had for some reason feigned the loss of the despatches; but this was all the more improbable, because the most disagreeable consequences seemed to threaten Elka if the papers were not soon discovered.

Could Brender have had any connection with the crime? He could give this man’s character full credit for such a deed: he possessed sufficient craftiness and daring. But how could it be possible for him to reach the casket and the baron’s key? This question was before the commissary; but he could find no answer to it.

He walked on in a path which was enclosed on both sides with dense shrubbery, and led to a small, retired summer-house. There

Green hoped to be able to give himself up to his thoughts undisturbed; for the little house was scarcely ever visited by any one.

As he approached the summer-house, he saw the maid of the baroness hurrying out of it with flushed cheeks. Scarcely returning his greeting, she hastened on. He tried to enter into conversation with her; but she did not listen to him. Her dark eyes avoided his gaze in confusion.

He had evidently disturbed a tender meeting. He entered the summer-house quickly, in order to see who was the happy man that had found favor in the eyes of the pretty, coquettish girl; but he found an empty room. He looked through the window indignantly; and there he saw the baron hastening rapidly over a little clearing, in order to reach the shrubbery.

"Ah, the baron himself!" he exclaimed in surprise. He had not expected this.

The whole mystery of the lost despatch seemed explained to him. The maid had a love-affair with the baron: she was admitted to his room, had found an opportunity to possess herself of the key,—perhaps she had skilfully drawn it from under his pillow while the baron slept,—and her little hand had opened the casket.

Not an instant did he doubt that this was actually the case: he had discovered a clew; and, if he followed it up, it must necessarily lead him to the attainment of his object. Chance had led him, as so often

before, into the right path; but to pursue it was no easy matter.

He could assume with the most perfect certainty that the maid had stolen the despatches under the orders and in the interest of another; and to discover who that other might be was his next task. But he must now proceed with the greatest caution in order not to expose the baron: the intrigue with his wife's maid must by no means be made public. In a few minutes, the commissary had projected his entire plan.

Alice stood on the veranda which led into the garden. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes still glistened with tears. Her mother had been talking with her, and had informed her of her father's wishes. The maiden's heart was engaged in a hard conflict with itself. She loved Arthur with all the fervor of a first affection; her heart beat faster at the thought of him; she was enraptured at the idea of belonging to him; and at the same time she was painfully moved because she could not fulfil her father's wish. She guessed, from her mother's intimations, how much depended upon her doing so. She had such boundless proofs of her father's kindness, and she clung to him with childlike love. The thought of sacrificing the happiness of her own life to his took possession of her; but it vanished as soon as Arthur's image arose, for she felt that she could not live without her beloved.

In this struggle with herself, she

stood on the veranda, plucking the leaves of the wild vine that twined around the pillars. She was to tear her heart, even as her little fingers picked these leaves to pieces. Should she strip the whole slender stock of its leaves, it would shoot forth anew, and perhaps, in a few weeks, repair the loss; but she would stand leafless and destroyed, her whole life long, if the blossom of her heart, her love, were broken.

She would gladly meet the captain with the greatest kindness, would laugh and joke with him, devote her whole time to him, and make his abode in her father's house as agreeable as possible, if he would not claim her heart.

At that moment, Altenberg approached the veranda. Alice shuddered as she saw him. She was still trembling with the agitation caused by the conversation with her mother; and the tears in her eyes were not yet dried. She wished to escape; but, nevertheless, she stood still, because she would not give the captain another opportunity to complain to her father of her want of courtesy.

Altenberg looked at her flushed face and tearful eyes. She had never seemed so beautiful to him. His intuitions told him that he had come at an unfavorable moment.

"You have been weeping, fair lady," said he, greeting her. "These tears give celestial beauty to your face; and yet I am angry with him who has caused them. I should be the happiest of men were I permitted to wipe them away."

Alice was silent. She scarcely heard the words addressed to her, for with all her might she was struggling for composure: he should not suspect what was passing in her heart. It seemed to her a desecration of her love, that he should know of its existence.

"Who has made your lovely eyes so tearful?" continued Altenberg, emboldened by Alice's silence. "I am ready to avenge these tears, even should I be obliged to stake my life in so doing."

"Herr Captain," replied Alice, collecting herself, "there are tears which are infinitely painful, and yet one would not willingly miss them. Suffer me, therefore, to shed these. I hope you have too high an opinion of your life to stake it for a maiden's tears."

"It has no value to me if I cannot devote it to your service," cried Altenberg, drawing nearer to her. A rapid glance convinced him that they were alone, beyond the reach of listening ears.

"Fräulein," said he, "I have only learned to care for my life since I met you last year. When I saw you the first time, I felt a new love of life coursing through my veins. Since that time, I have lived only on the thought of you. I tried to divert my mind: but, in the midst of the wildest pleasures, the form of an angel always stepped before me, filling me with me loathing for all such enjoyments; and that form was yours."

"Stop, Herr Captain!" cried Alice in great distress, stretching out her hand to ward him off.

Altenberg seized her hand, and tried to hold it fast.

“No, let me speak out,” he continued excitedly. “I have longed for this moment, and yet I had not courage to seek it; for your coldness has frightened me away more than once: and I trembled to think of the hour which was to decide the happiness of my whole life. Alice, I will not appeal to the fact that I can offer you more than thousands of other men; for I know that the heart places no value upon external, transitory possessions. I rest my hopes on this alone,—that I bring you a heart which loves you inexpressibly, which will never have another wish than to make you happy. Alice, if you knew how ardent and true is the love this heart feels for you, you would have compassion upon me; you would speak that one little word which would make me the happiest man on the whole earth.”

Alice stood there, trembling. With her left hand she grasped the gilded railing of the veranda to support herself. Inexpressible anguish had seized her. Her mother’s words sounded again in her ears. The image of her father stepped before her: it looked so sorrowful, and seemed to cry, “Make this sacrifice for me: thou art the only support to which I trust. I have loved thee as only a father can love his child, have rocked thee in my arms when thou wert a little one, have laughed and played with thee; I have tried to fulfil every wish of thine: now make this sacrifice for

me,—only this one; for this alone can save me.”

She hesitated, while her heart beat violently from anxiety and agitation. She was just in the act of speaking the word which would bind her forever, and bid her renounce the happiness for which she had hoped so joyfully; then Arthur’s face rose before her, looking at her with such a confident gaze. She had given her heart to him, had sworn love and fidelity to him: dared she break this oath? She could give up her own happiness; but she had no right to destroy his also. She would thus become a traitress,—perhaps the murderer of the man to whom her heart belonged forever.

Taking courage, she stood erect, and, in a slightly-trembling voice, said, “Herr von Altenberg, I have been cold to you because I suspected that your heart was drawn towards me, and I wished to spare you the confession you have just made. I do not mistake your love or your noble intention; and, if my heart can never belong to you, it will always be a comfort to me that I have not deceived you, that I have never awakened and nourished hopes in your heart which cannot be fulfilled.”

“Stop, stop!” interrupted Altenberg in extreme agitation. “You have no right to destroy the happiness of a man’s whole life in such a tranquil voice: it is a glowing, beating heart that you are breaking. Speak not the word that slays me. If you do not love me, leave me at least a hope; deprive me

not of all, all. I know that I shall win your heart, — perhaps not for months, nor for years ; but I know that you will give it to me at last, if not for love, yet for pity ; for you will have compassion upon a man who loves you so inexpressibly, so faithfully. Let me at least hope, hope. You dare not refuse me this request ! ”

Alice was deeply moved. The words of Altenberg bore the stamp of truth. She believed in the sincerity of his love ; and it pained her that she was, nevertheless, obliged to reject it. But was it not still more cruel to give him a hope to which he would cling in vain ? She could not deceive him.

“ Herr von Altenberg, even this hope I must take from you,” she said in a trembling voice. “ I will not deceive you ; for my heart can never, never, be yours.”

Filled with sorrow, Altenberg covered his face with both hands, and stood for a moment motionless ; then he let his hands drop, and, fixing his burning eyes upon Alice, said, —

“ And why can it never be mine ? Why ? ”

“ Ask me not,” replied Alice evasively.

“ I will tell you. Because you already love another,” continued the captain with increasing excitement. “ For the sake of another do you repulse me ; and I know who has stolen your heart from me.”

Alice was terrified at the expression of his flashing eye. She had fears for Arthur.

“ No, no ! I should never have loved you,” she said.

“ You have taken from my life its value,” cried Altenberg, forgetting himself more and more, as he yielded more fully to the sway of passion. “ Do you dream what a life without hope or value is ? A man plays with it as with a ball, risks it gladly, if he can thereby satisfy one single thought of vengeance.”

“ Ha, ha ! One throws it away ; but not in vain. Life for life ! And to this, to this, have you brought me ! ”

He rushed from the veranda into the garden, and disappeared in a path bordered with shrubbery.

Alice seemed stunned. She was about to call him back ; but, before she had summoned strength to speak, he vanished from her sight. Unutterable anguish seized her ; for she feared the worst results from this man’s wild passion. His words undoubtedly pointed to Arthur : on him would he revenge himself. Did he know that Arthur was still in the city ? She must inform her lover of the danger that threatened him : she would implore him to leave the city in order to avoid Altenberg.

She hesitated, uncertain whether she should herself hasten to him ; but, thinking it would attract attention if she left the house alone at that hour, she resolved to write to Arthur, and hastened to her room to carry out her resolution.

She quickly seated herself at her writing-desk ; but her hand trembled so violently, that she was unable to write a word. Her thoughts

were in a whirl ; her heart beat fast from excitement and agitation : at length, she broke down, exhausted, threw herself on to the sofa, and covered her face with both hands.

There is nothing more touching than the sorrow of a young girl. The heart, beating so vigorously, thinks it possesses strength to conquer the world, and bid defiance to the most furious storms ; but the feeble little hand grows lame at the first trial. The storm bends the frail reed ; and, in its helplessness, it is exposed to all the billows and buffetings of fate.

The captain, also, sought his room in a state of bitter, passionate excitement. His heart, his pride, his sense of honor,—all felt insulted. At this moment, his wild nature stood out untamed. From his youth up, he had been accustomed to carry out his will : all opposing elements he had overcome by means of his father's power and wealth (for gold is a powerful agent), and now his dearest wish was thwarted by the obstinacy of this maiden. He must renounce his claim because another man, who could neither vie with him in wealth nor in power, had already won the maiden's heart.

He burst into a loud and bitter laugh.

He had thought that any girl to whom he might offer his hand would deem herself fortunate. He was sure that no man possessed so many advantages as himself ; and yet he had been refused. His pride rebelled, his heart quivered ; for he loved Alice, and the opposition he

had met from her fanned his passion into a still fiercer flame.

Why should he stay any longer in this house ? Could he hope to overcome Alice's opposition, and win her heart ? If she would not be his, no one else should possess her. He knew that she loved Arthur,—the very man whom he already hated before he had a suspicion that he was his rival. He would seek him out : on him would he vent the rage which sent the blood boiling through his veins. He made no effort to calm himself : he did not wish to be calm ; for it gave him a feeling of satisfaction to give free rein to his passion.

He rang quickly for his servant. Brender entered. His sharp eye immediately detected his master's excitement.

"Brender, we leave to-day or to-morrow," said Altenberg. "Take care that the things are packed."

Had the captain been less excited, he would have noticed the consternation which his words caused the servant.

Brender stood silent. He seemed to expect that his master would add something more ; but Altenberg only paced up and down the room in great agitation.

"Where are we going ?" asked Brender.

"Pack the things," replied the captain sharply. "Am I to render an account of my actions to you, forsooth ? Stay here, if it does not please you to accompany me."

The violence of his master's excitement betrayed the cause of it to the crafty Brender.

He had seen him standing on the veranda with Alice. He knew the captain loved the young lady; now he also knew that he had proposed to her, and had been refused.

"Do you know where the young man, Arthur von Walter, whom we met here on our arrival, has gone?" asked Altenberg suddenly.

Brender's eyes lighted up. He had not been mistaken in his supposition.

"He is living in the city," he answered with a most unembarrassed countenance.

Altenberg looked up in surprise, and gazed inquiringly at Brender.

"You are mistaken," said he. "The young man was a nephew of the baron: he was here on a visit, and has gone away. Perhaps you may learn where he went, through the baron's servant."

"He is still here, — in the city," repeated Brender.

"Impossible! How do you know this?" interrupted Altenberg.

"I have seen him, and heard from his own mouth that he is staying here."

"Do you know him?"

"I have seen him here, — in this house."

"Where did you talk with him?"

"I have not spoken to him," replied Brender. "I only listened while he was talking to the baron's daughter."

"Where, where, was that?" cried the captain, interrupting him.

"In the garden."

"And when?"

"Late in the evening. You had

been to the theatre with the baron. After supper, the young lady went into the garden: this attracted my attention; and I followed her. In the shady avenue she met the young gentleman, her cousin. I succeeded in creeping close behind them, and listening to their conversation."

"What did they say?" cried Altenberg impatiently. "I wish to know all, — all!"

His eye was fixed on the servant's lips.

Brender smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"What lovers usually say," he replied. "They assured each other of their mutual love, and swore eternal fidelity. This they did repeatedly: I did not count the number of times."

"Of what did they speak besides this?" broke in the captain excitedly.

"The young gentleman informed the Fräulein that he should remain in the city, in entire seclusion, in order that her father, and you also, should know nothing about it."

"Why should not I know it?" inquired Altenberg, who sought to conceal from his servant what was passing in his mind, and why he was so embittered.

"That I do not know," answered Brender with a most innocent air.

Altenberg still paced through the room.

"Why did you not tell me this at once?" he finally asked.

"I could not suppose that it

would interest you," replied Brender, smiling. "Nothing occurred in the conversation touching yourself; else I should not have failed to report it to you immediately."

Altenberg cast a searching glance upon the servant, seeming to suspect that he was not telling the truth.

"Do you know where Herr von Walter is staying?" he asked.

"No. But, if you care to know, I hope I can ascertain for you."

"Make every effort to do so," said Altenberg. "It is of great importance for me to learn his residence, or some place that he frequents, where I can meet him. I will reward you for the information."

"This would require some little time; and, if we are going away soon, then" —

"I shall stay here a while longer," interrupted Altenberg. "Defer the packing until further orders. Have you only seen Herr von Walter and the Fräulein together once?"

"Only once," replied Brender; and he spoke the truth. He was evidently rejoiced that they were to stay longer in the city. The captain had no suspicion of the interests which governed his servant. He knew that Brender was crafty, knew that he dared not trust him; but such a skilful, capable servant, he had never before possessed. He could employ him for all purposes, — even for a secretary.

Brender's cultivation was far beyond that usually attained by men in his position; and he evi-

dently tried to conceal it in order that no suspicion might be awakened, as he wished, above all things, to avoid whatever would call attention to himself. In the few months that he had been in the captain's service, he had made himself almost indispensable, especially in travelling. He seemed to be at home under all circumstances; to be familiar with every place they passed through on a journey. He often divined his master's wishes and intentions, and possessed this desirable peculiarity, — that he never seemed to notice any thing which the captain wished concealed; and there was much in Altenberg's life which others might not know.

Had the captain bestowed greater attention upon this man, his character could not have escaped detection; but he was too much interested in other things to trouble himself about his servant.

Evening was approaching. A man might be seen slowly walking up and down before the gate of the villa. His heavy beard was deeply tinged with gray; and his figure, of medium height, seemed like that of a feeble man. To all appearance, he was merely taking a walk; but a close observer must have noticed that his gaze often passed beyond the gate, and that he kept it constantly in sight.

At length he entered a coffee-house opposite the villa, and seated himself close by the window. At his request, the waiter brought him a glass of lemonade and a newspaper. He took the paper, and held

it so as to conceal his face. He did not seem to feel the slightest interest in its contents; for his gaze was steadfastly fixed upon the gate of the villa.

This man was the commissary. No one would have recognized him in his disguise, upon which he had bestowed the greatest pains, because he intended to follow a man whose sharp eye he distrusted. He was going to watch Brender.

He had been struck with the fact that this man never spent an evening at the villa, but left it at the approach of twilight, and went into the city. What business could he have there, since he had asserted that he knew nothing about the place? Had he been trying to become familiar with the city, he would have chosen the day-time; and, if he were only seeking amusement, he would not have declined the escort which had been offered to him.

He had not waited long before he saw Brender leaving the villa. He quickly rose, and left the coffee-house. It was not difficult, at first, to follow him, and keep him constantly in sight. Brender was elegantly dressed. His whole appearance was different from that of a servant. He walked along like a man enjoying life, sporting a handsome cane in his right hand. Pausing for a moment under the shade of a tree, he put on a pair of gold spectacles, and then went on his way. Suddenly he entered a carriage standing a short distance from the villa. The commissary was too far off to hear the order given to

the driver; and the carriage drove swiftly away.

Indignation seized the commissary. His efforts seemed thwarted, for in a few minutes he must lose sight of Brender; and nowhere could he see a second carriage. But still he followed as fast as his feet would carry him, and still could see the carriage before him.

At length, an empty carriage approached him. He sprang quickly into it, pressed a piece of money into the driver's hand, and promised him double the sum if he would overtake the carriage ahead of them.

The driver's whip urged the horses to a gallop. In a state of the greatest suspense, Green looked out to watch the carriage he was pursuing. He was rapidly approaching it; and yet his purpose might easily be thwarted, if it should turn into a by-street. But fortune seemed to favor him. He approached to within thirty paces, and then ordered the driver to proceed more slowly.

Brender's carriage halted at a goldsmith's. He sprang out, and entered the shop. The commissary followed him, but remained standing outside the window in order to watch him. Not a movement could escape his eye. Brender's manner was easy and gentlemanly: no one would have suspected him to be a servant.

The goldsmith placed some rings before him, and he drew the glove from his left hand with the air of a man who was never accustomed to go without this article of dress.

He examined the rings with the eye of a connoisseur, and finally selected one: he then took out a pocket-book, and handed the goldsmith a bill. It must have been quite a large bill; for, as Green estimated, the goldsmith paid him back about twenty thalers.

Brender received the ring in a box, and then withdrew. Green turned away as he came out of the shop; but, as soon as Brender re-entered his carriage, he also sprang into his, and gave the word to the driver to begin the pursuit anew.

The commissary had no suspicion of Brender's object as yet. Perhaps he had bought the ring for a sweetheart. The large bill with which he had paid for it excited his attention: perhaps it was stolen from his master.

After a while, Brender's carriage stopped again. He dismounted, and paid the driver. Green also dismissed his carriage. Brender turned into a by-street, and once more entered a goldsmith's shop: this circumstance struck Green all the more forcibly because it proved that Brender was better known in the city than he had pretended to be.

Stationing himself at the window, as before, he again watched Brender in the sharpest manner, while he examined the rings, selected one, and paid for it with another large bill, receiving again about twenty thalers in change.

The commissary was convinced that Brender had not come honestly by this money; for he was evidently buying rings merely for the sake of

changing the bills, and thus escaping detection. But why did he not take them to a banker? Was he afraid such a man would first institute inquiries?

As Brender came out of the shop, and passed close by him, the commissary, wishing to conceal his face, stooped to pick up the cane, which he had let fall from apparent inadvertence. Brender went through several streets, and finally entered a cigar-shop. The commissary posted himself at the window.

Brender called for a variety of cigars, examined them very carefully, selected several kinds, had them packed with particular care, and marked with his name: he then looked in his portemonnaie for some money, and finally took another large bill from his pocket-book. Here, also, he received about twenty thalers. He left the shop sooner than Green expected, and seemed startled on seeing him. His suspicions were evidently aroused; for he stepped close up to Green, and looked at him sharply. The commissary scarcely seemed to notice him, though he did not lose sight of him for an instant.

Brender sprang into a carriage which was standing near by, and in a loud tone ordered the driver to proceed to a well-known place of amusement. For an instant, Green intended to follow him thither, but immediately abandoned the thought. He had a crafty man to deal with. Not without reason had Brender called the name of this place of amusement in such a loud voice. He had become suspi-

cious, and was trying to deceive his pursuer. It was never his intention to visit this place of amusement.

The commissary gave up the pursuit. A new suspicion had arisen in his mind; and he wished, first of all, to satisfy himself concerning it. When he could no longer see the carriage in which Brender had driven away, he turned back to the cigar-shop. A rapid glance convinced him that no one was present but the proprietor; and he quickly entered.

"A gentleman in gold spectacles bought some cigars of you a few minutes ago?" he inquired.

"Quite right," was the answer.

"He paid for the cigars with a large bill?" continued the commissary. The proprietor was obliged to confirm this also.

"May I ask you to show me this bill?" The cigar-dealer hesitated, and looked at Green in surprise.

"I do not know," . . . he answered doubtfully.

"Ah, you wish to know whether I have any authority to make this request," observed Green. "You are entirely in the right. I had forgotten to introduce myself. I am the police commissary, Green. Here are my credentials."

Involuntarily the cigar-dealer started back in alarm.

Green smiled. He knew that no one likes to have dealings with a police commissary.

"Do not be frightened," said he. "I hope to save you from something still more disagreeable. The bill must remain in your hands: I only

wish to look at it by way of preliminary."

The cigar-dealer reluctantly passed the bill to him.

Green took it to the gas-light, and examined it critically, drawing a microscope from his pocket to assist his sight. Suddenly an expression of joy shot over his face.

"The bill is counterfeit," said he in a confident tone. "You will permit me to take it with me."

As he spoke, he deposited the bill in his pocket-book with extreme care.

"I did not know that the bill was counterfeit: I do not know the gentleman who gave it to me," cried the cigar-dealer in anxiety and alarm.

"I believe you," replied the commissary soothingly. "Not the slightest suspicion will fall upon you. I chanced to witness the transaction myself, and saw the strange gentleman give you the bill. Can you remember whether you ever saw him in your shop before?"

"Never so far as I know."

"I think I can give you an assurance that you will recover the money you paid out in changing the bill," continued Green. "But, first of all, I must beg you to observe the deepest silence. Speak to no one about the matter."

The man promised to heed this request, adding, "Do you know the strange gentleman?"

"I know him," replied Green.

"Did you already suspect that he was circulating counterfeit money?"

"I did not yet suspect it; but

let us be silent on this point. Should the same gentleman come to you again in order to try the same experiment once more, receive him without embarrassment, and report the case to me immediately, at the police-office. Here is my card. But I beg that your communications be made to me alone, in person. I pledge myself that no harm shall happen to you in this affair."

The commissary then went to the two goldsmiths, and found, as he suspected, that Brender had given them both counterfeit bills. Of these, also, he took possession, and, in order to make sure that he was not deceived, placed them in the hands of a banker for examination. He declared the bills to be genuine, and only after the most careful, thorough scrutiny, and comparing them with bills of the same kind, which were undoubtedly genuine, was he convinced that they were counterfeit.

The false notes must have been made by a hand of extraordinary skill; for the counterfeiting could hardly be detected.

Accident had led Green on to the track of an unusually dangerous criminal. He was doubtful whether he ought to arrest him at once, but abandoned the thought, because he was persuaded that Brender was concerned in the robbery of the despatches. Moreover, there was no danger that Brender could escape him, since he had ample opportunity to watch his movements in the baron's house.

Brender had evidently circulated counterfeit bills on previous occa-

sions; and there was scarcely a doubt that he would repeat the attempt. And, if he did escape, it would not be difficult to find him, as he knew the criminal's appearance so well.

Green was strongly inclined to avail himself of another officer's assistance in watching Brender, but decided not to do so for fear he would not proceed with the requisite caution. He had learned himself how sharp Brender's eye was, and how craftily he went to work in the execution of a crime.

After changing his dress, Green sought an interview with the police-officer whom he had commissioned to watch Walter; but he had no information to give him, as Arthur had not left the house during the whole day.

"And you have assured yourself that there is but one way in which he could leave the house?" asked Green.

"There is but one," answered the officer confidently.

"It is possible that the young man will leave the house very soon, go out of the city, and climb over the wall into Baron Elka's garden. Follow him only to the wall, and there await his return, however long it may be delayed; then follow him with the greatest caution. Let me remind you once more that he must not suspect he is watched. Very likely your attention may be claimed till late at night; but I will take care that you have time to rest to-morrow."

The commissary now walked slowly towards the villa. His head

was so full, that he could hardly arrange his thoughts. He had discovered various clues; but they still ran confusedly together; and his gaze, usually so keen, was unable to see through the complicated knot. What an insight into the affairs at the villa had he obtained in a few days! How many envied the baron this splendid villa, it looked so peaceful, standing there amid the green trees, as if happiness and tranquillity must dwell therein; and yet how many mysteries did it conceal! how many intrigues were carried on there! Every one of the occupants seemed to have his own cares and interests: no common tie bound them together.

Green had a habit, when he was tired, and his thoughts had lost their elasticity, of giving himself up to the expansion of single ideas, and weaving upon them philosophical views. His experience had been so large, and so wonderfully varied, that at such moments it pressed upon him, by force as it were, reflections upon human nature and the relations of society, which is guided and bound together by a thousand threads.

He loved such moments, because they afforded him refreshment. Then he would often suffer the strange forms which he had met during his life to dance around him as in a wild tumult. He saw how they attracted and repelled; how one pursued another, and again sought to defend himself from a third: and the one thing which they had in common, which united and again separated them, was self-

ishness. Mercilessly one man swings himself above the head of another, that he may stand in a higher place. For a moment, he looks around, secure, unconscious that a third is already working at the slender plank on which he stands, in order to overthrow him, and raise himself.

The commissary had become a pessimist.

"If all men are not criminals," he was wont to say, "it is only because many can satisfy their desires without committing a crime. The rich man does not need to steal: he whom fortune has raised can look calmly down upon those beneath him; he need not crush them, because they can never approach him. The honest man enjoys his reputation only until some passion awakes within him, until temptation comes; then he, also, falls, for good for nothing are they all."

Reflecting thus, Green drew near the villa. He wished to walk a while in the quiet garden before going to his room; for the silence there was agreeable to him after being in the bustle of the city. Walking along through paths thickly shaded by shrubbery, he felt refreshed by the fragrance of flowers which was wafted towards him. He breathed more freely. In order to follow out the thoughts that had accompanied him thus far, he was about to turn into the shady avenue, and seat himself on the bench, when he unexpectedly saw the figure of a woman stepping from a side-path. He involuntarily drew back, thinking Alice was going to

meet her lover. But, as he carefully pushed aside the branches of the bush behind which he was standing, he recognized the maid of the baroness.

He was about to step out, rejoiced at meeting her alone at last, when he noticed that she gave a sign with her hand. She could not have seen him: the sign, therefore, must be meant for another. He resolved to await the arrival of that other one.

A moment afterwards, Brender followed her; and the two hurried on.

Green was astonished, not only at Brender's return, but at his understanding with the maid. He followed them with the greatest caution, drawing his boots off, so that his steps might not be heard. They seated themselves in a retired spot; and, though Green felt the importance of listening to their low conversation, it was almost impossible to approach them unobserved. Very cautiously he crept towards them, between the shrubbery, crawling on his hands and knees. The rustling of a dry leaf, the breaking of a withered twig, might betray him; for, with a man like Brender, he must suppose that caution would not be forgotten, even in the tenderest interview.

After untold exertion, he finally approached to within a few steps of them: scarcely a word escaped him.

"You must go away with me," whispered Brender.

"I have a very good place," replied the maid. "I am very well pleased here."

"You are a simpleton," broke in Brender. "Do you think you will not be a hundred times better pleased if you go with me? I shall then give up my place also. I have saved so much, that we can lead a careless, merry life."

The maid did not consent to Brender's proposal, but asked when he was going.

"That depends upon my master," was the answer. "In a few days, perhaps. I do not like to leave him earlier, because that would give offence. Hold yourself in readiness, Marie. You know that I love you: never again will you find a man whose heart cleaves to you so faithfully. I have loved you since the hour when first I saw you."

Though pressed so hard, the maid was still irresolute.

"Perhaps you love another," continued Brender. "The new secretary, perhaps?"

"I have hardly seen him," answered Marie.

"I have no faith in the man," said Brender: "his eyes look suspicious to me. He seems to have done but little work for the baron thus far; but perhaps he only took him into his service for pleasure?"

"I care nothing about him," observed Marie. "The baron is good-natured, and can hardly refuse any one who brings a request to him."

"Ha, ha! Do you know that from your own experience?" interrupted Brender with a laugh. "Confess, my dear girl, that the baron has already granted more than one of your requests. I will never again

rely upon my knowledge of mankind, if the baron's face does not plainly betray that he is utterly unable to resist a pair of pretty, dark eyes."

He clasped Marie in his arms; but in a half-indignant, half-coquettish manner, she released herself.

"I know nothing as to that," she replied. "You are mistaken in him."

"Hush, hush! you little witch," said Brender laughingly. "Have you seen the secretary this evening?"

"No."

"It seems to me as if I saw his eye in the city; but I am not sure. I would give a great deal to know whether there are two men in this place with the same eyes. Is your young lady at home, then?"

"How does that concern you?" said Marie.

"It concerns me very naturally, you little simpleton," continued Brender. "If she is not at home, you have nothing to do, and can sit here with me until we hear the carriage coming. Now, do you understand that she interests me very much?"

"She is at home," said Marie; "and I must expect her to ring for me at any moment."

"I think my master has designs upon her," said Brender. "You women have sharp eyes: do you think she loves him?"

Marie shook her head.

"My master is rich, very rich," continued Brender. "He often throws as much money away in one day as would support a large family

a year. If your young lady does not love him, then she has certainly given her heart to another."

Marie was silent.

"I would like to lay a wager that it belongs to the young man who went away soon after our arrival."

"How do you know that?" interrupted Marie.

"Ha, ha, you little witch! Do you think that a man's eyes cannot see? I know also that she writes to him, and that you take charge of her letters."

"Ha, ha! you are mistaken; for I have never yet been intrusted with a letter to him."

"Perhaps he has not left the city," remarked Brender.

"Of course he has. The baron is his uncle; and, if he were still in town, he would stay here."

"I am sorry for it. I could give him some information which would interest him, and is of the greatest importance, indeed; but I can only impart it personally."

"What is it about?" asked Marie with great curiosity.

"That is my secret, little fool! I might easily lose my place if I should gossip incautiously. Tell me where the young man resides."

"I do not know."

"But your young lady knows: can you not learn from her?"

"I do not dare ask her. Had she written to him, I should certainly have known it."

At that moment, they heard a bell ringing violently. Marie sprang up. In vain did Brender try to hold her back. She tore herself from his arms, and ran hastily away.

Brender quietly kept his seat, and compelled the commissary to wait, also, in his painfully-constrained position.

Green had hoped to learn more from this conversation. Not a word had been said concerning the despatch,—the subject which claimed his highest interest. But he was confirmed in his suspicions in regard to Brender. It was clear to him that he had only entered upon this love-affair with the maid in order to sound her. He evidently knew that Walter was still in the city; and the sole object of his crafty questions was to discover the place of his abode. But why was he trying to discover it? What relations existed between him and the young man who loved Alice? Ever more and more complicated were affairs becoming, so that he was quite unable to survey them all.

At length Brender rose, and relieved the commissary from his uncomfortable position.

About an hour later, Arthur and Alice met in the garden, and enjoyed the happiness of being together, not suspecting that a man was hidden behind a tree, listening to them: it was Brender.

When they separated, Brender followed Arthur on his way home, like a shadow. He noticed that another man was also following him, who tried to conceal himself as much as possible in the shadow of the opposite houses until Arthur reached his dwelling. Brender impressed the number of the house upon his mind, and then returned home.

On his way, he met the commissary. Both were astonished in an equal degree at meeting each other. Green first recovered his composure.

“Ha, ha! At last I meet you!” he cried in the jolliest tone, playing the part of a man exhilarated by wine. “Not a word: you are recognized. You told me you had no time for pleasure; and yet you are roaming the streets late in the evening. Hush, old friend! I know all! One need not have been brought up in the city to know you. In the street at this hour! Brender, you are a scamp: that I saw at the first glance. Now you must drink one more glass of wine with me: you must, I say. Ha, ha! I feel to-night as if I could empty fifty flasks. Brender, you are a famous fellow, who knows how to appreciate a good flask of wine. Come on, then!”

Before Brender could answer, the commissary took his arm, and drew him along.

“Come!” he continued. “Ha, ha! I will be your guide: you do not yet know where there is a drop worth drinking. Brender, old boy. Ha, ha! I’ll wager that I will drink you under the table,—under the table, I say.”

Brender did not refuse to accompany him.

“You seem to have been in merry company,” said he.

“Company! No: I have not been in any company,” cried Green. “Ha, ha, old boy! you have missed your guess. I have been to the theatre with my

little sweetheart; and after that we took supper, and drank a few flasks of wine. God save wine, and God save love!"

Almost staggering along, he drew Brender into a wine-cellar, and, in a loud voice, ordered some wine.

"Now drink, my boy," cried Green. "I was really angry with you because you declined my services as an escort, and have not been friendly enough towards you. But there are moments in a man's life when he forgets every thing. Now drink to the health of all whom we love."

The glasses rang against each other.

"I went into the city a little while ago," said Brender. "When one has been working the whole day, he longs for recreation."

"Ha, ha! That is just my case," cried Green with a laugh, as he filled the glasses anew. "I have but little to do now, to be sure; but I am afraid these fine days will soon be over. Brender, why did not fate allot money to us?—I mean a great deal of money. We should have been the jolliest fellows! In the morning a delicate breakfast; at noon a grand dinner; and in the evening a supper in the society of ladies. Brender, I see that I touch your secret desires. Such a life would please you! Eh?"

Brender smiled,—a subtle smile.

"A poor servant like myself can never think of leading such a life. I am satisfied if I only have my simple bread."

"I am never satisfied," cried Green, interrupting him. "Am I to see others living like gods, and content myself with water? Nonsense! man lives but once."

"Does your purse allow you often to lead such a life as you have to-night?" inquired Brender.

The commissary laughed softly "Ha, ha! A crafty man always finds some means. Brender," he continued in a whisper, "honesty may be a very good thing; but it brings a man a devilish small income. Ha, ha! will it buy you a flask of wine, or even a cigar? *Apropos*, have you a cigar about you?"

Brender handed him his cigar-case. With the air and the enjoyment of a *connoisseur*, Green smoked his cigar.

"A famous weed, a genuine Havana!" he cried. "Where did you buy it?"

"I do not know the name of the dealer. I entered his shop by good luck."

"Do you take me for a fool, old boy, that I should believe this story?" broke in Green. "Your master's cigar-box is the place where these were bought."

Brender denied the imputation.

"Ha, ha! Softly, my friend, softly," continued Green. "Do not look so frightened. A master is bound to provide his servants with the necessaries of life, among which a cultivated man reckons a good cigar; consequently, a servant has a right to his master's cigar-box. Ha! Is not that logi-

cal? Nothing goes beyond sound logic."

"But very dangerous consequences result from it," said Brender, shrugging his shoulders.

"Of course, of course," replied Green. "One must apply this logic very cautiously. I believe your master has a sharp eye. How long will he remain here?"

"I cannot tell. He does not speak to me about such things."

"Is he pleased with the place?" continued Green.

"I do not know, but have no doubt that he is. He has certainly been very kindly received by the baron."

Green tried to make Brender drink freely, in order to loosen his tongue; but he did not succeed. He was cautious in drinking, and still more so in talking. He laughed at Green's jokes, but did not become in the least degree more communicative. At length, he urged their departure, as it was so late at night.

Green was about to pay the bill, but searched in vain for his purse.

"Do you pay it for me," said he.

"I will discharge my debt early to-morrow morning. Ha, ha! I suspect my little sweetheart has played a joke upon me, and drawn my purse from my pocket."

Brender readily paid for the wine. Green cast a hasty glance into his portemonnaie; but it contained very little money. The one he had a few hours before, when he was purchasing rings and cigars, was much finer.

They walked home arm in arm.

Green faithfully carried out the tipsy character he had assumed. As they drew near the villa, he noticed a man slowly walking up and down, evidently waiting for some one. At the first glance, he recognized in him one of the most desperate and cunning knaves in the city, who knew him also. It would therefore be very disagreeable to the commissary to meet him now, since he might easily betray his real position. At the same instant, he felt a convulsive movement of Brender's arm. He, too, seemed to know the man, and to feel surprised or alarmed at seeing him.

A rapid side-glance at his companion's face convinced the commissary that he was not mistaken. He therefore dropped Brender's arm, and stepped aside; while the servant walked on quickly, and spoke a few hurried words to the man, who thereupon retreated immediately.

Green pretended that he had not seen the man. With a merry jest he rang the bell: the porter opened the door, and they entered the villa.

On the following morning, Arthur was in his room in the happiest frame of mind. Alice had told him the previous evening, how decidedly she had rejected the captain's suit. Now she was his, his forever. Every feeling of jealousy had vanished from his heart. He was no longer angry, even with the captain. Alice had promised that he might claim her soon; and, reclining on the sofa, he painted the happiness of the future. He would ex-

ert himself to the utmost to make her life pleasant; and imagination transformed his little estate to a paradise, in which he wandered with Alice.

He had not yet applied to Alice's parents for her hand; but he doubted not that they would willingly consent, for they both loved him, and had met him in the most friendly manner.

His reveries were disturbed by a knock at his door. Unwillingly he called out, "Come in!"

A man whom he did not know entered, and handed him a letter. He carefully scrutinized the direction, which ran thus, "Herr Arthur von Walter, lord of a manor." The number of the house, and the name of the street, were added correctly. The handwriting was distinct, firm, and handsome; but he did not recognize it.

"Who gave you the letter?" asked Arthur, before opening it.

"A gentleman who came from the hotel of the Crown Prince. I do not know him," replied the messenger.

Again Arthur examined the direction, trying to recall the writing.

"Does the gentleman expect an answer?"

"He said nothing to me about it. Arthur gave the man some drink-money, and dismissed him. He then read the letter, which caused him to look up in astonishment. It ran thus:—

"Only by a fortunate accident have I learned your address. What has happened to make you a hermit? I am to be here only till to-morrow,

and must speak to you. In an hour I will await you at the new restaurant. I conceal my name until then, in order to see whether your memory is faithful. Pray come. With hearty greetings.

"AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE."

Once more he glanced over the lines. He thought the handwriting was familiar, and yet he could not remember whose it was. In vain did he summon before his mind the handwriting of all his friends and acquaintances: this was still unknown.

At last, he threw the letter down indignantly. Might not some one be playing a joke upon him? If the writer of the letter were really an old acquaintance, by what accident could he have discovered his residence, since he had kept it entirely secret. That Alice had betrayed it, he could not suppose.

And then the thought impressed itself upon him, that, owing to his very secrecy, no one could be playing a joke upon him.

He resolved that he would not obey the summons; but, nevertheless, his curiosity increased more and more. Was it not possible that an acquaintance would really await him at the appointed place? He sprang up hastily to dress himself.

Before an hour had passed, he was on his way to the restaurant. Arrived there, his eye glanced over the various rooms with intense interest. There were but few guests present, breakfasting, or reading their newspapers; but they were all strangers to him. He seated him-

self in a corner, from which he could overlook the entrance, and, for appearance' sake, seized a paper.

Scarcely a moment had he sat there when he saw Capt. von Altenberg come in. Arthur shuddered involuntarily. The thought that the letter had come from him arose in his mind; but at the same time he was forced to admit that Altenberg knew nothing about his residence in the city. He, as well as the baron, believed that he had gone away days before.

Altenberg looked hurriedly round the room, but not did seem to see Arthur. Chance appeared to lead him into his vicinity; and his eye fell upon him just as he was about to take a seat.

A half-surprised, half-scornful smile flitted over his face.

"Ah, Herr von Walter! you here!" he cried, drawing a few steps nearer. "I was firmly convinced that you left the city several days ago."

A feeling of embarrassment took possession of Arthur. His conciliatory frame of mind was speedily dissipated by the captain's scornful smile.

"I think my presence in the city now does not exclude the fact of my departure a few days ago," he replied. "Is it any thing so extraordinary that I have returned?"

"Certainly not," said Altenberg. "I no longer need think, then, that my arrival has driven you from your uncle's house?"

"Assuredly not," replied Arthur. "My departure was decided upon before you came. Moreover,

my uncle's house is large enough for us both."

"Undoubtedly," broke in Altenberg. "I should, at least, have endeavored to take as little notice of you as possible."

Arthur started up. The blood left his face: he no longer doubted that the letter had come from Altenberg.

"Herr Captain, you seem to have come here only to insult me!" he cried in a slightly-trembling voice.

Altenberg shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"I leave the interpretation of my words entirely to yourself," he replied. "If you find any thing insulting in them, I have no objection, but am, of course, ready to give you satisfaction, if you have courage to demand it, and do not prefer to shelter yourself behind your uncle's position."

Arthur was hardly able to restrain his violent anger.

"These words correspond perfectly to your infamous character," he exclaimed. "Our conversation is at an end. Every additional word spoken to you would be an injury to my honor. Your character is well known to me: you have signalized it sufficiently by the honorable affair with the ballet-dancer: at that time, your father's position sheltered you. Should I make that story public to-morrow, it would no longer be possible for you to wear the mask behind which you hide, or to carry the sword of an officer. You know the claim that the criminal law has upon you."

With these words he turned his back upon the captain, and walked to the window.

The blood had faded from Altenberg's face, which was now of an ashy hue. He was about to make some reply ; but his trembling lips refused their service. He had no suspicion that Arthur knew of that dark point in his life : he was thus entirely in his power.

He rushed from the restaurant, which he had entered with such audacious haughtiness ; beckoned to Brender, who was waiting for him at a little distance ; and then flung himself into a carriage with his servant.

He proceeded to the baron's villa without delay, and there shut himself up in his room. With quick and restless step he paced up and down : his face was hideously distorted. At length, he laughed aloud in scorn and bitterness. The thought lying nearest to his heart seemed, at last, to occur to him.

Had he not the most certain prospect of a duel with the hated Arthur ? and might he not hope to close his mouth forever ? He was one of the best pistol-shots : his hand never missed its aim, and never trembled when he was standing opposite an adversary. Not only did he wish to vent his hate upon Arthur ; but he felt that he must kill him to secure his own safety.

Then might Alice give her hand to the dead man : she might try to be happy with him. He had little cause to fear the consequences of a duel : the military court had mild

views and laws concerning such matters ; and, if he should actually be condemned to imprisonment in a fortress, he might hope for a speedy pardon through the influence of his father.

He was undecided, for a moment, as to whether he should take Brender into the secret. But he could not dispense with his assistance ; and he believed, also, that he could rely upon his silence. He opened the door, and called to his servant.

Brender entered, with a look of keen observation on his face. He had already guessed that his master was aiming at a duel with Arthur ; but he had been puzzled by the consternation in which the captain had returned from the restaurant. In vain had he reflected upon the subject.

"Brender," said Altenberg, "I have had a quarrel with Herr von Walter, which will doubtless lead to a duel."

Brender nodded in assent, as if he were hearing something that he already knew.

"I need your help, and think I can rely upon your silence," continued Altenberg. "You know I pay well for such services. No one in this house must learn any thing about the matter, — no one !"

"You know that I understand how to be silent," observed Brender. "Moreover, I have nothing to do with any one in the house."

"It is very possible that the result of the duel may be bad (I do not mean for myself) ; but still it would oblige me to depart immediately. Can you pack my things,

and prepare for instant departure, without letting any one know what you are doing?"

Brender smiled with an expression of superiority: this task would be very easy to him.

"Rely upon me, Herr Captain," he replied. "When will the duel take place?"

"Early to-morrow morning, probably."

"Then I will pack your things in the night; and not even the sharpest ear shall hear a sound. I only desire that your ball may hit Herr von Walter in the right place."

"I hope so," was the reply of Altenberg, who was too much excited to notice that Brender was trying to sound him.

"Might not your object be attained in another and far surer way?" observed Brender in a half whisper. "No one can control a ball when it has left the barrel."

Altenberg looked up in astonishment.

Had Brender touched a thought that had already risen in his own mind? "What do you mean?" he asked.

Brender shrugged his shoulders with a cunning smile.

Altenberg paced up and down the room a few times in silence.

"No," he answered. "The duel must take place; my honor demands it: and I can trust to my hand."

"And if you should be wounded yourself?"

"Hush, hush!" broke in Altenberg. "Herr von Walter is an unpractised shot."

"Shall you go away to-morrow, at all events?" questioned Brender.

"At all events."

"And whither?"

"That I will tell you early in the morning: it depends upon circumstances. You will accompany me to the place of combat: the question will be decided there. In case of the worst, you will follow me later with the things, if I should be compelled to leave immediately."

Over Brender's face flashed a subtle smile.

"I rely upon your activity and your silence," said Altenberg. "Now, spend this day in the way most agreeable to yourself."

With these words he stepped to his secretary, and handed the servant several pieces of gold.

"You shall be entirely satisfied with me," said Brender as he left the room.

Arthur had sent a challenge to the captain by a friend, which was, of course, accepted. He now sat in his room reflecting upon what had taken place. Far from him was every thought of fear, for his personal courage was great; but his enthusiastic character plunged him into a melancholy frame of mind, which completely mastered him. He could not drive it away.

In the midst of his happiness, Altenberg's revenge struck him. He longed to see Alice once more, and to talk with her; but still he was afraid to write, requesting an interview, because he felt that he should not have strength enough to conceal from her what had occurred. He was a man of too much

feeling for his own comfort. A hundred others would have looked forward with a light heart to the coming day. At length he seated himself at his writing-desk, and wrote to Alice, telling her all his thoughts and feelings. She was to receive the letter after the duel. He wrote it under the foreboding impression of coming death, like a man who is bidding farewell to the life and happiness to which he clings with every pulsation of his heart, because honor is of the highest worth to him.

At the same hour, the captain was practising with his pistol in a shooting-gallery, in order to convince himself that he still possessed his old skill; but Arthur thought not of doing so, though he was conscious that he had not had a pistol in his hand for a long time.

On the evening of this day the commissary, skilfully disguised, followed Brender into the city, and saw him once more passing counterfeit bills. He still hesitated to arrest him, however, because he could not easily escape him.

Late in the evening he returned, and, in order to enjoy the warm summer night, threw himself into one of the seats in the garden. By chance, he could overlook the windows of the captain's room from this place. His attention was attracted by seeing that they were still lighted; though all the household had betaken themselves to rest. The curtains were carefully drawn, so that he could not look into the room; but he noticed the shadow of

a person moving back and forth incessantly. Not until day was dawning was the light extinguished. A window was opened; and he saw Brender's head looking out.

The suspicion arose in the commissary's mind that the captain was about to go away, and that Brender was packing the things. The secrecy with which this was done led him to suppose that the departure was to be secret also, or very sudden. He had no idea why the captain's preparations for departure were made so secretly. The thought that Altenberg knew about the circulation of the counterfeit bills occurred to him; but he rejected it after brief reflection, for this suspicion had no foundation, since Altenberg's father was very rich.

He decided to adopt measures of prudence without delay; and therefore, swinging himself over the wall, he hastened to the police-office.

There he commissioned several officers to stay in the vicinity of the villa, thoroughly disguised, and to watch Brender in the most careful manner. If he left the villa, they were to follow him, and, in case he repaired to the railway station, he was to be arrested.

He himself undertook to continue his watch of Brender within the villa. Sleep surprised him after the night spent in watching. He fell asleep, sitting by the window in his room. He was wakened by the sound of a passing carriage. Brender had been for the carriage, as it seemed: he sprang from it, and hastened into the house. Were

they about to depart? the commissary thought so. He quickly left the house, and stepped behind some shrubbery, where he could watch the carriage.

A few minutes afterwards, Altenberg and Brender came out of the house, and entered the carriage. It struck Green that they had no baggage with them. Brender carried only a small, polished box under his arm, and his master's overcoat.

What was their intention?

Green could not think the captain was taking his leave, because the baron would have accompanied him, and placed his own carriage at the disposal of his guest. Still less was it to be supposed that they were merely taking a drive; for they would not have entered the carriage in such haste. It seemed to him as if they looked around timidly, and would gladly be unseen. At the same moment, he saw two of the disguised police-officers slowly passing the villa: this relieved Green; for he now knew that Brender could not escape him.

The carriage rolled swiftly away with the captain and Brender, taking the road leading away from the city. Green was about to hasten after it, when a piece of paper lying on the ground attracted his attention. He picked it up quickly. One glance at the letter sufficed to explain every thing.

It ran as follows:—

“DEAR FRIEND,—Herr von Walter's second has just been to see

me, requesting me to make arrangements to have the duel take place an hour earlier in the morning. I can but acquiesce in the reasons which he alleges for this wish: he fears, that, at the hour originally appointed, some disturbance would be caused by persons passing the place of combat. Such a disturbance would be no less unpleasant to yourself. Walter's second will provide his pistols; but do you bring your own with you,—those with which you have practised. Abandon the idea of shooting at the head: the breast is surer. Do not call for me in the morning: I will await you at the entrance of the birch-grove. To that point I will ride on horseback: there we will leave the carriage also, and take a short cut to the oak on foot. I wish you a peaceful night, because sound sleep gives a steady hand.

“Farewell till to-morrow morning. Yours,

“CHEPAR.”

A moment the commissary stood there in astonishment, reading once more the letter, which was directed to the captain, and which he must have dropped as he entered the carriage. He then instantly decided upon the course he was to pursue.

He hastened to the baron's room, and was received by him with great excitement.

“I have just sent for you,” he cried. “A new attempt to open the casket has been made during the past night: look at the key!”

Another interest lay nearer the commissary's mind at that moment.

"First of all, read this letter, Herr Baron," he replied.

Elka took the letter, and glanced over it.

"I do not understand it," he said. "A duel is in question; but my nephew went away several days ago."

"He is still here."

"Impossible! He has left the city," exclaimed Elka.

"He has not left it. I have seen him myself, and can point out his residence to you."

"Where did you see him?"

"Here, — in the garden."

"Alone?"

Green hesitated before giving an answer. Was he at liberty to betray the secret of the lovers? He must: it could no longer remain a secret.

"With your daughter," he replied.

The baron stamped his foot indignantly.

"Why did you not inform me of this at once?" he asked.

"Herr Baron, I am here in the interest of an entirely different matter. I am accustomed to respect the secrets of every family, and should have kept this one locked up in my breast, if the duel had not seemed to stand in the closest connection with it."

The baron's gaze was fixed for a moment. He now knew why Alice had treated the captain so coldly; and the consequences of this coldness now struck him with double force.

"What ought I to do first?" he asked in a half-absent manner.

"Try to prevent the duel," answered the commissary. "I might have done this alone; but the affair would then attract greater attention, and involve far different consequences: I believed that I was acting entirely for your interest in informing you of every thing, and seeking your intervention to prevent the duel."

"You are right; you are right! I thank you," exclaimed Elka in a hurried, excited manner. "The duel must not take place. I must prevent it at all events. You do not dream how much depends upon it."

"Then we must not delay a moment longer," replied Green. "Capt. von Altenberg has already gone to the place of combat."

"Already, now!" cried the baron in alarm. "Order my carriage as quickly as possible, while I am dressing."

He rang hurriedly for George. Never had his servant seen him in such consternation: too much trouble had assailed him on that morning.

A few minutes later, the carriage in which the baron and the commissary were seated rolled along towards the birch-grove. The driver urged his horses to their utmost speed.

Near the grove, the commissary met the two officers, who were hurrying after Brender. They tried to inform Green that they were following him. He interrupted them.

"Get in : I know all !" he cried. "Has the carriage containing the two gentlemen much the start of us ?"

"About half a mile," answered one of the officers. "We could not follow it faster."

"I see you have done your full duty. It is to be hoped that we are not yet too late."

Thus far the baron had sat silent. He seemed to take no interest in what was passing, so many cares filled his mind. The whole affair still seemed mysterious to him.

"What will you do if the duel has already taken place ?" he asked the commissary.

Green shrugged his shoulders evasively. "I cannot decide : it depends upon circumstances."

"You will understand that it is of great importance to me that this unfortunate duel should be kept secret. You know that Capt. von Altenberg is the son of the minister. He is visiting at my house : to his father, as well as to myself, the consequences would be most unpleasant."

"I hope you will yet succeed in preventing the duel," replied Green. "If this is possible, I shall not meddle with the affair."

He then bent from the carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive still faster.

The horses ran at a full gallop.

"Do you know who gave occasion for this duel, — who brought it on ?" continued Elka.

"The only thing that I know about it, I learned from the letter I gave you ; but I think I am not

mistaken in assuring you that Capt. von Altenberg brought it on. Your nephew seemed to use every effort to keep his residence in the city secret. In what way the captain learned it is still incomprehensible to me."

"And what could have been the occasion of the duel ?"

"Jealousy, I think," replied the commissary.

The baron relapsed into silence.

The carriage had already turned into the grove ; and, as the road became rough, Green gave the order to halt, in order that they might traverse the short distance to the oak, on foot.

He sprang from the carriage to assist the baron in dismounting. At that moment a shot was heard.

Green stamped angrily upon the ground.

"We come too late," he said.

The baron did not answer : his face was strikingly pale.

About half a minute later, a second shot was heard.

Elka hurried swiftly on in the greatest excitement. The commissary whispered a few words to the two officers, and then hastened after the baron. He was himself excited by the two shots ; for he could not yet estimate the consequences.

They soon reached the place of combat, under the oak. A single glance was sufficient to show them what had taken place. Arthur was lying on the ground ; several gentlemen were standing near him ; a physician knelt by his side.

At a distance of about twenty

paces stood the captain, talking with his servant. A scornful smile was on his face. He started in alarm when he saw Elka and Green.

Elka hastened towards him greatly excited.

"Herr Captain, what has happened?" he cried, scarcely able to utter these words.

Altenberg shrugged his shoulders.

"A duel, as you see, Herr Baron. Your presence surprises me, though I might almost have anticipated it."

"My nephew is wounded!" exclaimed Elka. "You have wounded him. I thought you would have more regard for the hospitality I have shown you."

"Herr Baron, I am not accustomed to listen to reproaches," replied Altenberg angrily.

A gentleman called Elka to the wounded man, whose life was thought to be in danger.

Elka rushed to his nephew.

The commissary intentionally remained in the captain's vicinity. He did not yet know what he ought to do. The situation had become too serious for him to feel justified in non-interference. One of the gentlemen standing near the wounded man approached Altenberg with an excited look. He seemed to be Arthur's second.

"Herr Capt. von Altenberg," said he in a trembling voice, "your conduct during this duel has been very remarkable: I hardly think it can be reconciled with ideas of honor."

Altenberg started.

"I do not understand you!" he cried.

"Then I will speak more plainly. I cannot connect your conduct with the ideas of honor which I entertain."

"Ah! you wish to insult me," exclaimed Altenberg. "You demand satisfaction. I am ready to give it to you, if you will follow me; for I shall leave the city to-day."

"You will not leave the city," said Green, stepping before the captain, and looking him firmly in the eye.

With a scornful glance, Altenberg measured him from head to foot.

"Who are you?" he inquired haughtily.

"The police-commissary Green," was the quiet answer.

"Ah! the baron is very cautious," observed Altenberg mockingly. "But I am a military man, and not answerable to the police."

"You will obey me," replied Green.

Brender had scarcely heard Green's words, when he prudently attempted to withdraw.

"Stop, Herr Brender!" cried Green. "I must request you, also, to remain here."

Brender stood still, and tried to look at ease.

"My servant has had nothing to do with the duel," interposed Altenberg. "I pray you to leave him unmolested."

The commissary did not listen to these words. He approached Brender, who was pressing his

lips firmly together: his face was pale.

"Herr Brender, you are my prisoner," said Green, smiling.

"I know not who you are," cried Brender, concealing his anxiety under a bold tone. "A secretary can lay no commands upon me."

"Very true; but this time it is a commissary of the criminal police who lays the command upon you."

"And why am I to be arrested?" asked Brender.

"I pray you to leave my servant unmolested," cried Altenberg, coming towards them.

"Why, Herr Brender?" continued Green quietly. "In order that you may make statements concerning certain bills which you have issued."

Brender started back as if struck by lightning. His face was distorted, his eyes glowed. What he had feared had happened: he was outwitted and detected.

He quickly drew a revolver from his pocket.

"Go to the devil, then!" he cried, aiming at Green.

Not one of his movements had escaped the commissary. He sprang aside quickly, and struck Brender's arm a blow with a short-sword. The shot echoed through the wood, the ball lodged in a tree; Brender's arm sank powerless; the revolver fell from his hand.

They could hear the criminal gnashing his teeth in bitterness as he saw his design frustrated. Without a moment's delay, he rushed into the woods, trying to save

himself by flight. The commissary did not follow him, but gave a piercing whistle. Instantly the two officers rushed towards the fugitive. The next minute, Brender was in their power.

"Bind him hand and foot! No forbearance with the criminal!" cried Green.

Brender tried to resist, but in vain. He was thrown down, and fettered.

His eye was fixed on Green with burning hatred.

"We will talk another time," said he, gnashing his teeth in impotent rage.

"Later, my friend, later," answered the commissary, with a quiet smile. "Counterfeiting, and an attempt to commit murder, will give a fine number of years in the penitentiary. When these have passed, I am at your service."

Brender was silent, and averted his eyes, because he could not endure the sight of the man who had decided his fate.

The shot had attracted the attention of those who were busied about Arthur. Even the baron hastened to the place whence it proceeded.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"Herr von Altenberg's servant has been making an unsuccessful attempt to murder me," replied the commissary, with a sharp glance at the captain. "I had him arrested on account of a crime."

"What has he done?" asked Altenberg defiantly, almost imperiously.

"The examination will bring that out in detail, Herr Captain," replied Green, indignant at the defiant tone. "It is to be hoped you had no knowledge of the fact that your servant was circulating counterfeit bills. Perhaps he has still more of these papers in his possession: therefore I must attach his things, as well as yours, which he packed during the past night."

"Herr Baron, I seem to have been watched by the police in your house."

"Only your servant," said Green.

The general consternation was increased by this incident.

Green now approached Arthur, who lay unconscious. The ball had entered his breast; and the physician was trying to find and draw it out with a probe. His grave face betrayed plainly enough his anxiety respecting Arthur's life.

"Have you any hope?" asked Green, bending low as he spoke.

"Scarcely," was the brief answer.

The captain stood at a short distance, in animated conversation with the baron.

The commissary now learned the particulars as to the duel.

Arthur had had the first shot; had fired quickly,—almost without taking aim,—and missed. Quietly, with a scornful smile, had the captain advanced to the utmost limit allowed; twice had he raised his pistol; and then, at a distance of about ten paces, had taken aim and fired, as composedly as if he had been shooting at a target.

His whole conduct, his deliberate

composure, called forth all the greater indignation because it was well known that he was more than ten times superior to Arthur in shooting. His shot gave the impression of intentional murder.

At Green's command, the baron's carriage was sent for in order to convey the still unconscious Arthur to the city.

The baron, who was very anxious about Arthur, gave directions that he should be taken to his house: he then drew Green aside.

"Herr Commissary," said he, "is it possible for the captain to leave the city to-day? I desire it on his father's account; and I, also, might thus be spared much that would be disagreeable. I hope the life of my nephew will not be endangered, and that it will lie in our power to keep the duel secret."

Green shrugged his shoulders doubtfully.

"My power does not extend so far," he replied. "Herr Baron, when my position prescribes definite duties to me, I dare not have regard to any thing that interferes with them. Perhaps it will be possible for the chief of police to grant your request: I cannot."

Elka seemed to be unpleasantly affected by these words.

"Does it conflict with your duty to avoid, at present, all publicity in the arrest of the captain and his servant?" he inquired.

"Not at all, if the captain will submit to my orders. I will accompany them both to the police-office, in the captain's carriage: then my responsibility is at an end.

But you must permit me to set a guard over the captain's room, until I have examined it."

"Act in accordance with your duty, so far as my house is concerned," replied Elka. "I only beg you to inform the chief of police that I shall come to him as soon as I have conducted my nephew to my house in safety."

A few minutes afterwards, the two carriages passed through the woods, on their way to the city. In the first sat the captain, Brender, and the commissary. Altenberg looked out from the carriage, and softly whistled an opera air; while Brender closed his eyes, that he might not see the commissary, the man he hated.

The carriage in which the wounded man lay followed slowly.

Alice sat by Arthur's bed. At the baron's command, he had been placed in the same room he had occupied for weeks. The physician had examined the wound once more, and drawn the ball from his breast. Arthur had known nothing of all this; for his consciousness had not yet returned.

When Arthur was brought into the house, the baroness was not present. Anxiety concerning the captain had driven Elka to the police-office; for he dared not delay, if he would effect any thing in Altenberg's favor. The physician had given the care of Arthur into George's hands, and enjoined upon him to pay the greatest attention to the wounded man, and to keep him perfectly quiet. But no

sooner did Alice learn the fate of her lover, than she hastened to him, and, almost by force, took the care of him from George.

She sat by the bed, motionless, listening anxiously to every breath of her lover. Her cheeks were pale, but she shed not a tear; for she felt that this hour of fear and danger was not the time to give free vent to her grief. Arthur's condition claimed all her strength and attention.

She herself, following the physician's directions, laid the wet cloths on Arthur's breast. She bent down, and softly kissed the hand, in which there was but a feeble pulsation of life. How pale was his face! If he should never again open the eyes that had often looked so lovingly upon her, in which her whole happiness dwelt! Untold anguish seized her. She wished to call for help; but she scarcely dared to breathe, for the quiet, feeble respiration of the sick man deceived her: she thought he was sleeping. She pressed both hands upon her heart in order to still its throbbing by force; for no sound must disturb the sleeper.

It was no longer a secret in the villa, that Arthur had been wounded in a duel with the captain. Alice knew it also. She doubted not that she had been the cause of the duel. She suspected that it was only an act of revenge because she had rejected Altenberg's love: she therefore blamed herself for Arthur's wound, and yet she could not have acted otherwise. She would have preferred death to the fate of

being compelled to live by Altenberg's side.

While her eye rested upon Arthur's face, the color came more and more into his cheeks. She thought, at first, this was a sign of returning vitality ; but all too soon was she aware that this flush was owing to the fever that had set in, in consequence of his wound : it increased from moment to moment. Arthur opened his eyes ; and Alice, in great joy, called him by name. He looked at her fixedly, but did not recognize her. He did not feel the pressure of her hand.

"Do not tell Alice that he wished to kill me," he cried. "How slowly he raises the pistol ! how he takes aim ! The villain means to kill me ! Stop, this is no honorable combat ! Ha, ha ! yet he will not gain Alice's heart ; for she loves me, — me !"

He tried to spring out of bed ; but Alice held him back forcibly. Her heart trembled with joy, because, even in his feverish dreams, his thoughts were fixed upon her ; and yet she was filled with unspeakable anguish.

At this moment her mother entered the room. She had learned every thing from George. Deeply affected, she hastened to Arthur's bedside, and met his fixed gaze. "There he is, there he is !" he cried in a loud tone, bending back as he spoke. "Snatch the pistol from him !"

Again he tried to spring from the bed. The baroness called the servant to assist them, and tried to remove Alice from the room.

"No !" said the maiden decidedly, though her voice trembled. "I remain here. Arthur is my betrothed : I have given my heart to him ; and now, least of all, can I leave him."

The baroness was but little surprised ; for she had suspected that the hearts of these two were already united. But how did Arthur come hither ? Why was he in the city, when he had just left it ? These questions rushed through her mind ; but this was not the time to make inquiries, for her whole endeavors were directed to removing Alice from the room.

The girl refused to leave in the most positive manner : she manifested a firmness of will, that her own mother had never noticed before.

Stern experience of life had suddenly approached her in all its ruggedness, and had rapidly brought her to a state of maturity which she might not otherwise have attained for years. This phenomenon occurs far more frequently in the life of young girls than in that of young men.

The feverish fancies of the sick man became still wilder and more violent. When the baroness saw that all her efforts to remove Alice were in vain, and that she would suffer ten times as much if she were separated from her lover, she herself left the room, and retired to her own apartment, because she could not endure the sick man's wild, fixed gaze.

She threw herself into a chair, exhausted. She had learned from

George that Arthur had been wounded by the captain in a duel; but she knew nothing more. Where was her husband? Why had he left the house when Arthur still needed his assistance?

She had not understood Elka of late. A certain uneasiness was perceptible in his manner, which was utterly foreign to him, and which he had vainly tried to conceal. She knew him only as the skilful diplomatist, who, even in the most disagreeable situations, was wont to wear a quiet smile, which did not in the least betray to others what was passing in his mind.

She had not wished to question him, because she was convinced that he would give her all the information she need have. But she could hardly endure any longer the uneasiness which took possession of her. It was not anxiety about his property that disturbed and oppressed him; for she knew, that, in this respect, he was very sanguine. His disquietude could not have arisen from the fact that Alice had not listened to Altenberg's suit; for, however much he desired the alliance, it had not escaped her attention that he by no means liked the captain, and was only moved by outside considerations to treat him with politeness. She knew, also, that his ambition was excited; that he hoped to be called into the ministry through the influence of Altenberg's father. Could he not attain this object in any other way? might not his unusual ca-

pability lead him to the desired position?

His depression must be owing to some very different cause. With sudden resolution she rose and went to her husband's room. From himself would she demand information as to the doubts and questions that tormented her.

She paused on the threshold, in surprise, as she saw her husband sitting motionless, with his face covered with both hands. She quietly approached him. He heard not her step as it fell upon the soft carpet. For a moment, she stood by the side of her husband, who was not yet conscious of her presence. Then she gently laid her hand upon his shoulder.

Elka started, and sprang up. He seemed to be alarmed at the sight of his wife.

"Oscar, what is the matter?" asked the baroness.

Elka passed his hand over his brow, and exerted himself to the utmost to regain his composure.

"Nothing, nothing," he replied evasively, half-absently; but it was no longer possible to deceive her.

"Oscar, does your face tell the truth, or your lips?" said the baroness gently, seizing her husband's hand. The hand was cold. "I have come here to ask what has troubled and oppressed you for the last few days. Those who have been united as long as we learn to read each other's eyes, even if those eyes try to betray nothing. Events have taken place here that are still incomprehensible to me."

Elka sighed deeply.

"They are incomprehensible even to me," said he. "They are still a mystery to me; but I already feel the grievous consequences resulting from them. Too much has come upon me in these last days. What I had laboriously erected — that on which all my hopes were set — is shattered, destroyed."

The baroness was silent. Then, without being questioned further, he informed her of the mysterious loss of the despatches.

"I do not yet know who has stolen them. I cannot even throw suspicion upon any one," he continued. "Every thing, for me, depends upon these despatches. I tried to comfort myself with the hope that no use would be made of them. Oh! this hope even has been disappointed. The contents are already published in a foreign paper; my government is thereby exposed; I myself — Here, here, is a letter from the Minister von Altenberg, in which he makes inquiries respecting the despatches. He asserts that here alone could their contents have been known: moreover, that newspaper article was dated here. He adds, that he expects a satisfactory explanation from me, all the more because he particularly enjoined upon me the importance of the despatches. What answer am I to make to him? Can I deny that the despatches have been stolen from me? Can the government deny their existence, since there is reason to fear that the entire con-

tents may be published? I see no possibility of rescue."

He threw himself into his chair in great agitation.

"The despatches were stolen from your casket?" inquired the baroness.

Elka nodded in assent. Every word cost him an effort.

"The key has not been out of my hands: the lock is uninjured. I myself have locked the door of my room. The theft has been repeated. Invisible hands have accomplished the deed. I stand in the presence of a mystery which excites me all the more because I no longer feel safe in my own apartment. And to fill the measure of my anxiety comes this duel, which will probably cost Arthur his life. I have made every effort to procure Altenberg's release, and to extort from the chief of police a promise to keep the duel secret. I did it for his father's sake; for I should not interest myself for the captain; and, after I have succeeded in doing all this, the minister's letter comes upon me, reproaching me with bitter words. Leonore, I fear a sad future is before me."

The baroness understood the painful position of her husband; but still she tried to comfort him.

"Oscar, do you not take too dark a view of the circumstances?" said she. "I am not used to seeing you lose your courage, and am convinced, that, even now, you will find some way of escape."

Elka shook his head.

"There is no way of escape for me if I have any regard for my honor," he replied. "I knew the importance of the despatches: they were intrusted to me; I must be answerable for them. I shall myself request the minister to release me from my post. With that my career ends: I know it. I have sacrificed every thing to it,—my property and my powers. I have been a fool to venture upon a path where every thing may be destroyed by a single undeserved mischance. My dream is over."

In vain did the baroness attempt to cheer him.

"Forbear, forbear!" he cried. "I could endure it more easily if you were not compelled to suffer with me. Leave me alone; attend to Arthur. I am not calm enough to busy myself about him; but let it be your care to preserve his life."

"He is in the hands of one who will take the best care of him. Alice is with him."

Elka did not seem surprised at this information.

"Let her stay," said he. "I fear that Arthur will be her only refuge; for I can do little more for her. My wish that she should marry the captain is overthrown: Altenberg himself has made it an impossibility. I received him in my house as a guest; I procured his release; and still we parted as enemies. I should now be opposed to him, even if Alice were ready to give him her hand. Leave me alone, Leonore. I need rest: perhaps I shall succeed in recovering myself."

The baroness silently pressed his hand, and left the room.

Once more Elka took the minister's letter, and read it through attentively. Bitter reproach and censure were expressed in the very manner of inquiry. This pained him all the more keenly because it was the first time he had given occasion for such a tone. One thing more he saw in the letter: Altenberg had not been so kindly and favorably disposed towards him as he had believed him to be; otherwise, his skilful pen would have employed words which would be less offensive. It seemed to be his intention to wound the baron's feelings.

Could the captain have informed him already of his unsuccessful endeavor to win Alice? Then the letter was more hateful still. One thing was clear to Elka: his honor would not allow him to suffer such reproach, even if there were any ground for it. It might have been expressed in a dozen other ways. He was resolved to apply for dismissal from his post as ambassador. He would not give the minister the satisfaction of recalling him. Only as to the way in which he should take this important step was he still in doubt. He could not deny that the reproach and censure were founded on fact: the despatches had been stolen from him, and made public.

Again he read the article which the minister had enclosed. It was beyond question that the writer had really gained his knowledge from the despatches: he even chal

lenged the government to deny the facts, if it could do so. It could not.

This article could not fail to attract attention ; and the entire free-thinking press would gain possession of it. The government would be forced to impose silence upon its own organs, because it could not fight against facts. Altenberg would be exposed in the worst manner ; for the despatches had proceeded from him.

Elka paced up and down his room, feeling utterly helpless. The commissary entered.

“ Truly, Herr Commissary, your efforts are fruitless,” cried Elka excitedly. “ The despatches that were stolen from me have already been made public. It was all important for me to prevent this ; but it is now too late, and the consequences cannot be averted.”

Green shrugged his shoulders. “ I am conscious that I have spared no exertion,” he replied. “ In my long experience as a police-officer, a case has never come before me, in which, after uninterrupted investigation for days, I have been unable to discover the slightest clew. I am forced to confess that I stand just where I did the first day.”

“ I will not reproach you ; for I know that you have done your whole duty,” observed Elka.

“ And where were the despatches made public ? ” asked the commissary.

“ In a foreign newspaper, in an article that was dated here.”

“ That does not prove that it really came from here,” said Green.

“ Many newspapers employ the

artifice of dating their correspondence and articles from other places, when it is for their interest to conceal the source from which their information is drawn. In this case, could there be but one source ? ”

“ One only. Besides myself, Minister von Altenberg alone possesses a copy of the despatches,” was the baron’s answer.

“ Still there is a second source,” said Green with a smile. “ You mentioned, this morning, that a fresh attempt to open the casket had been made during the past night.

“ Undoubtedly ; for the wax in the key is pressed together.”

“ May I ask you for the key ? ” said Green.

Elka handed it to him.

The commissary subjected the key to the most careful scrutiny, and then examined the lock also. A satisfied smile passed over his face.

“ Now we have, at least, the certainty that the casket was opened with this key, as I suspected from the first,” said he. “ The wax in the key is pressed together, and a small piece is left sticking in the lock. This discovery must necessarily lead us further. Where did you keep the key last night ? ”

“ Under my pillow, as usual. I retired late, and, up to that moment, wore the key on my watch-chain.”

“ Was the door of this room locked ? ” continued Green.

“ I bolted it myself. That second door leads into my sleeping-room.”

“ Might not some one have passed through that ? ”

“ Impossible ; for the door of that room was bolted also.”

“Herr Baron, I need not remind you that my duty requires me to be discreet, and that certain secrets remain forever locked in my breast. My employment as a police-commissary gives me a deep insight into many family matters; but never will any one hear a word from my lips concerning them.”

The baron looked at him in astonishment.

“Herr Commissary, I do not understand you, and cannot guess the purport of your words.”

Green seemed undecided for an instant whether he should make any further inquiry; for he knew that the baron must understand him. But he had bestowed too much thought upon this matter to drop it on account of any scruples.

“Herr Baron,” said he with a smile, “has your wife’s maid never been in your sleeping-room at night?”

The flush which instantly overspread Elka’s face betrayed to the commissary that he had touched upon an unpleasant subject.

“Herr Commissary, why do you ask this question?” he indignantly exclaimed.

Green shrugged his shoulders slightly. “I am suspicious of this lady. Would it be impossible for her to take the key from you, when you are asleep, and open the casket? She is sly; and I think we may give her credit for such a deed.”

“That may be; but still I do not understand your question,” observed Elka.

“Well, Herr Baron, if I have committed an error in speaking of

my supposition, I beg your pardon, and pray you to release me from the duty of searching for the thief. I can only accomplish my task by meeting with perfect frankness. That I should in no wise abuse it, you might assume with confidence. But the question I addressed to you was not without justification; for I chanced to witness a meeting that you had with the young lady in the summer-house.”

He bowed, and was about to leave the room.

Elka was startled at these last words; and again a flush passed over his face. His embarrassment did not suffer him to speak. But, before Green had left the room, he cried, “Stay, Herr Commissary, I implore you.”

Green staid.

Elka walked up and down the room a few times, until he had regained his composure.

“Herr Commissary, I rely upon your silence,” he then said. “For the rest, I can assure you that the maid has never been in my room at night. Why do you suspect her?”

“She had also entered into a love-affair with the captain’s servant; and her connection with that dangerous man caused me to suspect the worst.”

The baron bit his lips.

“Have you convinced yourself of this also?” he asked, with a touch of scorn in his voice.

“Of this also,” assented Green. “I had double reason to watch the servant carefully; and so I became a witness to a love-scene with the maid. He even gave her a

ring, which he had bought the same evening in order to change his counterfeit bills. He tried to persuade the girl to flee with him, and pictured the life that she would lead with him in such alluring colors, that I was forced to smile involuntarily."

Elka had pressed his lips together firmly. This information seemed to affect him very unpleasantly; and still he did not wish to betray that he felt it.

"And what did she reply?" he finally asked.

"She seemed to have no real faith in the man's words; and I also am convinced that his intentions were not honorable. Perhaps he only intended to gain her entire confidence in order the more easily to sound her on various points."

"On what, do you think?" broke in Elka.

"That is hard to decide; for who can guess the designs of such a crafty criminal? Might he not have some new crime in view? Perhaps his intention was merely to make use of the maid to negotiate his counterfeit bills."

"Is it, then, positively proved that he has circulated counterfeit money?" asked the baron.

"It is proved. I saw him myself on several occasions. I watched him, and followed him, in disguise, because he seemed a suspicious character to me. He asserted that he was here for the first time; and yet he betrayed remarkable familiarity with the city. I have not yet succeeded in establishing his personality; for, that

Brender is not his true name, we may assume with certainty. He may be a dangerous criminal, who has reason to fear the police; and only entered the captain's service in order to come here without attracting notice, and to remove all suspicion from himself."

"The captain praised his extraordinary skill and usefulness. He asserted that he had never had so capable a servant."

The commissary smiled.

"That is easily explained. The greatest criminals are, for the most part, very skilful persons. The business is now made so difficult for criminals, that blockheads can no longer prosper in it. They generally fall into our hands at the first attempt. I have never yet met a stupid counterfeiter; and the hand that manufactured the bills which Brender circulated is surely very skilful."

"Do you think that he did it himself?"

"I do, though I have no strong ground for the suspicion."

"Have you already examined his things, and the captain's?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"And what was the result?"

A shade of indignation flitted over the commissary's face.

"A very small one," he replied.

"I found nothing that would serve in any respect as proof against the man; though I have searched his things with a care and minuteness that another would hardly have bestowed upon them. The worst article of clothing I subjected to the most critical examination;

searched every object, and every corner of the room, and found nothing suspicious. I am afraid I have arrested the man too soon."

"You think you will not be able to prove the crime of which he is guilty?" observed the baron.

Green shook his head.

"I do not mean that; for the proof already exists. But as I have found nothing among his things, not even money; as Brender had but a small sum with him at the time of his arrest; especially as I miss the pocket-book in which he had the counterfeit bills, — it is evident that he has either concealed in a safe place, or committed to the hands of an accomplice, every thing that can serve as proof against him, as well as the money which he received in exchange for the counterfeit bills. That he has accomplices, is beyond doubt; for I myself saw him exchange a few hurried words with one of them. I shall search this man's house, though I hardly think a crafty man, like Brender, would intrust large sums of money to another. Neither is it to be supposed that he had brought but few of the counterfeit bills here; for the opportunity to exchange them was too favorable. It was my intention not to arrest him until he was ready for his journey, and just entering the railway carriage; for then I might hope that he would carry every thing with him: this was prevented by the duel."

"He will never confess where he has hidden the money, I presume," remarked Elka.

"Certainly not; for then he would be sure to lose it," answered Green. "Your intercession with the chief of police has set the captain at liberty," he added with a bitter smile. "I think a few weeks' imprisonment would not have hurt the gentleman."

The baron touched upon this subject reluctantly.

"Regard for his father compelled me to take this course," he answered shortly. He was vexed at the moment that he had shown this regard; for neither the captain nor his father had thanked him for it.

"Herr Baron," continued Green, "my sojourn in your house has now become useless, and would effect nothing, because it is no longer a secret that I am a police-officer. If I should remain here, the one who stole the despatches from you would be doubly on his guard, and would hardly make another attempt to open the casket. The repeated opening of it shows a degree of audacity which is incomprehensible to me. My residence here, thus far, is explained by Brender's arrest; and I should be glad if you would mention, in the presence of your servants, that I have only been here on his account. One way only remains for me to discover the thief, who is doubtless one of the occupants of this house.

"What is that?" interrupted Elka impatiently.

"I will spend a succession of nights in this room, without allowing any one but yourself to

suspect my presence. Perhaps the mysterious criminal will make one more attempt."

"How will it be possible for you to do this without the knowledge of my servant?" broke in Elka.

"I shall choose the way of which thieves alone usually avail themselves, but of which the police also can make use. I shall enter secretly, through the window, in the evening. I only ask you to leave this window unlocked. I have reflected upon this expedient, and examined the difficulties attending it. They are not great. By a slight exertion, one can reach the balcony; and from that there are only two more steps."

"Are you not afraid of falling?"

"Have no fears. I have undertaken more dangerous journeys, and was a skilful gymnast in my youth. I shall leave your house to-day, and I already know how to reach your park unseen by climbing over the wall."

"Do you think you will succeed in discovering the thief in this way?" asked Elka.

"I should not like to leave this means untried, at least. The case is so mysterious and peculiar, that it is of great importance to ourselves to solve the mystery; not to mention that my duty urges me on."

"You know that I have submitted to all your arrangements, and will gladly do so now also; for I have the greatest confidence in you. Permit me to ask you one more question. Will it be necessary for you to examine my wife's maid?"

Green understood the anxiety which prompted this question.

"I hardly think so," he answered. "Should it be necessary, I need not assure you that it will be done with the greatest discretion. I hope you will never have reason to find fault with me."

"I am convinced of that, Herr Commissary," said Elka, "and be assured, also, that I will prove my gratitude for your exertions, no matter whether they lead to the object in view, or not."

Capt. von Altenberg left the city on the day of the duel. Elka received a few hurried lines from him, in which he requested that his things might be sent after him, when they had been examined by the police. The baron threw the letter down indignantly. Scarcely a word of thanks for the hospitality he had received did the captain add. He did not even trouble himself to say farewell to the baroness and her daughter.

Almost at the same time, a letter came from Minister von Altenberg, urgently demanding an explanation. The despatch that had been published excited great attention, and was sharply criticised by the free-thinking press.

Altenberg wrote briefly, in a tone of unmistakable irritation, and used this sharp expression: that he desired an explanation as to who was chargeable with the gross violation of duty, by which alone the despatch could have found its way to the public.

These words wounded Elka all

the more deeply, because he was unconscious of any violation of duty; and yet he saw no possibility of clearing himself. He resolved, that, in answering Altenberg's letter, he would at the same time make application to be released from his post, since he deemed his honor insulted. That he was compelled to take this course afflicted him more deeply than his anxiety for the future; though that weighed heavily upon him. He realized, that, in retiring from his position as ambassador, he was bidding farewell to his public career. After this experience with the captain, he could never hope to renew the friendly relations with Altenberg; for he was very sensitive, and placed his interests far before those of the state.

This, then, was the end of his ambitious plans, for which he had sacrificed so much,—retiring to private life with the residue of his fortune, which would barely suffice to support him, and must place many restrictions upon him. He was resolved to bear these things without murmuring: there were even times when he longed for rest. But could he expect that his wife would part, with the same ease and composure, from a life that had brought her so many joys and pleasures?

He thought of Alice also. What could he do to make her future secure? She loved Arthur. He was convinced that she would be happy with him; but if he should now sink under his wound, if this hope also, almost his last, should be

destroyed— He tried to drive these thoughts away by force.

He left the room hurriedly, and went to the one in which Arthur lay.

The physician met him in the anteroom. Elka grasped his hand.

“How is your patient?” he asked, in a voice trembling with agitation.

The physician's face looked very doubtful.

“I hope his youthful, vigorous constitution will overcome the danger.”

“Herr Doctor, have you only a hope? can you give me no certainty?” cried Elka. “You are one of the most able men in your profession. Does not your knowledge even extend so far that you can accurately discern the bounds of life and death?”

The physician shrugged his shoulders.

“We can do nothing, if Nature leaves us in the lurch. All our efforts can only be directed to this,—to remove every thing that might prevent the activity of the natural forces. He who maintains that he can do more than this stands no longer upon the foundation of knowledge. I can pronounce no positive opinion until the fever that has seized the patient subsides.”

“And when, when, will that time come?” asked Elka.

“Even that I cannot decide. The violence with which it has set in leads me to suppose that it will be of short duration. Vigorous constitutions usually pass more rapidly through such fevers; but the

danger is certainly increased thereby."

"Has all the care been taken that is in any way required?" asked Elka.

"The patient has the best care. Every thing has been done to secure quiet for him."

"Is my daughter still with him?"

"Yes."

"Do you not think her presence will agitate him when he recovers his consciousness?"

A smile stole over the physician's face.

"There are kinds of agitation that are more beneficial to a sick man than any other remedy: such is the tumult of joy, that makes the blood circulate more swiftly, but at the same time brings calmness and satisfaction to the mind. I do not think the patient could be intrusted to better hands."

Elka went into Arthur's room. Alice was still sitting by his bed. She did not hear her father enter, and he stood motionless by the door.

Alice's beautiful profile was sharply drawn against the light that penetrated through the window. Her eyes were fixed upon her lover. Anxiety was written on her brow. Her hands clasped the right hand of the patient, which quivered in the restlessness of fever.

Never had Elka been more struck by his daughter's beauty than at this moment. Sorrow had transformed it. A calm, gentle expression was on her face. Love for his child knocked powerfully at Elka's heart. He had wished to sacrifice

Alice for his interests, for his plans; with unmistakable lightness had he thought of her happiness. Did happiness, then, consist in the splendor of outward circumstances alone? Might not these be destroyed by a single heavy blow of fate? And what would then be left to her, even if she had hitherto benumbed her heart by wealth and splendor? Never would she have found happiness by Altenberg's side.

He could not stifle the self-reproaches that pressed upon him. Perhaps the bitter trials that had lately come upon him were only intended to show how vain was all that on which he had placed his hopes.

A few hours before, he had begged his wife to leave him, in order that he might seek to recover himself by rest. The peaceful look of his daughter; her sorrow, and yet her happiness, in caring for her lover,—these helped the baron to recover himself. Without betraying his presence by a word, he quietly and cautiously left the room. He felt a firm confidence that Arthur would recover.

He returned to his library. George approached him with evident signs of confusion and embarrassment. Elka was in a sympathetic mood.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

The servant stammered forth that he had a request to make.

"Speak freely," continued Elka. "I will do any thing in my power for you. You have served me faithfully, and I have never before had an opportunity to acknowledge this."

George bashfully informed him, that he loved Marie the maid, and intended to marry her.

Elka started involuntarily, and was obliged to summon all his self-control in order not to betray that he took a particular interest in the girl.

"George, have you given mature consideration to this step?" he inquired.

"I have," replied the servant. "And, if I have been foolish, I could not act otherwise. I love the girl, and know that I cannot be happy without her."

"But have you also asked yourself whether you will be happy with Marie?" asked Elka.

"No: I would rather be unhappy with her than to live without her."

"George, I cannot prevent you from carrying out your intention, nor would I do so; but I must remind you that your characters are too dissimilar to allow any harmony to exist between them. And what is happiness but a spirit of harmony with ourselves, and with those who are nearest to us?"

George looked wonderingly at his master, whose words were beyond his power of comprehension.

"I cannot give the girl up," was all he said in reply.

"And is Marie ready to be yours?" continued Elka. "Does she really love you?"

"Certainly she loves me," exclaimed the servant; for, with all his inferiority of intellect, he still had such a good opinion of himself and his superior powers, that

he would have thought it incredible that Marie should not love him.

"She has told me herself, that she did not wish always to be a servant-maid, and that she should be glad to have a home of her own before long. My lord, I cannot wrong her. I know no want here: nevertheless, I would not like to be a servant forever. Every one strives to make himself independent."

"So you wish to leave me?" said Elka.

"Not yet, not so soon," answered George in confusion; "but when I am married, then" —

He did not finish the sentence.

"I do not reproach you for it," continued Elka. "It is possible that I may leave the city soon: a change would probably be made then. But what do you intend to do? Have you already made plans for the future?"

A confident smile passed over the servant's face.

"Certainly, my lord. I have saved a little money, and Marie has also: with this, we intend to open a restaurant. I have thought of this for years, and hope I shall prosper in it. Marie, also, is pleased with the plan: and I think she will attract many guests; for she can be very agreeable."

The baron smiled involuntarily. George was speculating on his future wife's powers of pleasing, without thinking of the danger that lay therein.

"George," said Elka, "I will not oppose your resolution. You are honest, and have served me

faithfully : therefore I desire your happiness. But I wish to give you one piece of advice : seek to attract guests to your restaurant by your own affability and attention, and not by means of your future wife's pleasing manners. You will do better to expose her to temptation as little as possible."

"Marie loves me," interrupted George, feeling almost insulted.

"I believe you ; but she is fickle," replied Elka. "I desire that you may both be happy ; and I do not doubt that you will become a very excellent host. If I can in any way contribute to your ease in entering upon your future career, I will do it. Tell me your wishes frankly : I owe it to you, and to Marie also," he added half aloud.

The servant went away with the warmest thanks.

Elka had had another plan for Marie in his head ; but, as she had voluntarily promised to become George's wife, he resolved not to oppose her, and to repress his own wishes. He seated himself at his writing-desk to sketch the letter which he intended to address to the minister. The despatches were to be answered for ; Altenberg's insulting reproaches to be repelled in the most decided way ; and at the same time he was to ask to be recalled from his post. He must also write a private letter to Altenberg, telling him of the duel, and of the accident caused by his son.

Now that he stood directly before the decisive step of his whole life, the greatest calmness had

come upon him. His hand guided the pen as firmly as if he were writing a very indifferent business-notice.

At about the same time, Green was in his room at the police-office. He felt exhausted after the excitement of the day ; but still one more task awaited him, which claimed his entire strength. He was to examine Brender. He was unwilling to commit this difficult task to another, and was equally unwilling to defer it until the next day, as that would only give the crafty criminal more time to think of falsehoods and evasions.

He remained sitting quietly a short time, in order to recover himself, and reflect upon the course he should adopt with Brender ; for he felt that this crafty man could not be treated like other criminals. Then he arose hastily, and directed a police-officer to lead the prisoner to him. Until he came, Green paced up and down the room. The air seemed sultry to him, and he opened the window. He was forced to smile at the uneasiness that had taken possession of him.

At length Brender entered. His face was calm ; and a slight, half-scornful smile played around his mouth. He carried his right arm in a sling : it was the same arm that had raised the revolver against Green in the morning, and had been heavily struck by his sword.

Green looked fixedly at him for a few seconds ; but he bore the gaze without the quivering of an eyelid. He no longer showed the hatred he

had betrayed after his arrest in the morning.

"Since we are acquainted," began Green, with a slight touch of pleasantry, "I may be allowed to advise you to confess your guilt fully. It will be best for you, because you will thus win a claim to a milder sentence."

Brender preserved perfect composure: only his eyes seemed to become brighter.

"I do not know what guilt you mean," he replied. "I do not at all deny, that, in my excitement this morning, I pointed a revolver at you."

"Of course not; because a denial would only make you ridiculous, since so many witnesses were present. And why did you draw the revolver?"

Brender shrugged his shoulders.

"In order to kill me," continued Green, "to silence my lips forever, because you knew that I should appear as a witness of your crime."

"No one can prove that I had this intention," said Brender. "I sought to defend my freedom, and, in my excitement, seized upon this means."

"Drop this subject! That matter requires no further discussion: it is, indeed, sufficiently established," interrupted Green. "In the first place, tell me your name."

"You know it already. My Christian name is Henry."

"Brender is not your name," said Green decidedly. "Do not think you can deceive me so easily. The necessary steps have already been taken to determine your personal-

ity; and you only make your position worse by false statements."

"Brender is my name: I have never borne another," answered the prisoner.

"Have you brought any legitimization papers here?" continued the commissary.

"No: I thought I should not need them while in the company of my master. Had I suspected that I should be arrested here, and that my word would not be believed, I should certainly have done so."

"Well, this question will soon be explained. Where did you get the counterfeit bills that you have circulated here?"

"Counterfeit bills?" repeated Brender with signs of the greatest astonishment. "I do not understand you."

"Brender, you will come out badly, if you go on in this way," exclaimed Green. "I am used to the attempt of criminals to deny their guilt; but they only do so when they promise themselves some success in the effort. I myself have watched you on three occasions when you were passing counterfeit bills. They are now in my hands. Do you still venture to deny the crime?"

"I know nothing about it," replied Brender with perfect composure.

"Do you mean to deny, that, three evenings ago, you changed some large bills at two goldsmiths' and a cigar-shop?" cried Green.

"That I admit," replied Brender.

"Where did you get those bills?"

Brender hesitated before replying, as if considering what to say.

"I found them," he finally answered.

"Where?"

"In the baron's park."

"I should have given you credit for a more sensible subterfuge. This one is pretty well worn out, and is hardly employed even by beginners in the career of crime."

"I can only speak the truth."

"Well, we will see where the truth will lead you. When did you find the bills?"

"The same day on which I passed them."

"How many bills did you find?"

"Ten."

"Have you spent them all?"

"No."

"Where are the others?"

"In my pocket-book."

"And where is the pocket-book?"

"I had it with me this morning, here in my coat-pocket: it has disappeared. I do not know where it is. It probably fell out when I was thrown down this morning."

"Then it would have been found. Where have you left the money that you received in exchange for the bills?"

"That also was in the pocket-book."

"And you did not know that the bills which you pretend to have found were counterfeit?"

"Should I, then, have passed them?" broke in Brender.

This reproach sounded almost artless.

"Why did you go to work so cautiously in changing the bills?"

"I know of no caution. I changed the bills because I was afraid it might be discovered that I had found them; and it was my intention to keep the money."

"Aha! You are very familiar with the penal code, and know that the punishment for retaining what one finds is far more mild than that inflicted upon a counterfeiter?"

"I have never given my attention to the penal code."

"One gains some knowledge of it when he has been frequently punished."

"I have never been punished."

"On this point, also, we shall soon have the necessary information from your home. Why did you wear gold spectacles that evening?"

Brender smiled.

"From pardonable vanity. I have often done it when I have been out."

"You have often been in this city?"

"Never."

"And yet you have such a thorough knowledge of it."

"I find my way in a strange city very easily."

"On that evening, you mentioned to your driver the firms of the goldsmiths, and the names of the streets."

"I had impressed them upon my mind a few hours before, because I intended to change the bills."

"This you could have done more easily and quickly at a banker's."

"That I allow; but I did not know where to find one."

"Say, rather, you were afraid the banker would perceive that the bills were counterfeit."

"I did not know that they were counterfeit."

"Do you really think that I shall give the slightest credit to your statements?"

"I hope so," replied Brender. "I have told the whole truth. My master will assure you that I am far from being a criminal."

"Your master has merely said that he did not trouble himself about your past life, and knew nothing concerning it. Moreover, he has already left the city."

Brender's eyes flashed. He seemed to have expected that Altenberg would interest himself in his behalf.

"He must bear witness that I have served him faithfully."

"He has only testified that he was very well satisfied with your skill and usefulness. He had no proof of your faithlessness; but, for all that, he doubted your honesty."

"I do not believe he said that."

"His deposition is recorded. I might read it to you from the register."

Brender gnashed his teeth audibly. For a moment, he lost his calmness.

"Ha! The captain has no right to make such a deposition; for he can prove no dishonesty on my part," he exclaimed, greatly excited. "He seems to have forgotten that I can testify against him; that more than one of his secrets rests in my hands; that I know

enough to destroy his honor. I have reason to doubt his honesty; for the whole history of the duel" —

He interrupted himself, as if he had already said more than he intended to say.

"What do you know about the captain?" asked Green with perfect indifference apparently.

"Various things; but I shall be silent concerning them. I wish to prove to him that I am a faithful servant."

"That will affect him but little," remarked Green. "He seemed to have no further interest in your fate. Perhaps he was connected with you in the counterfeiting business?"

Green spoke these words almost in a whisper: something treacherous lay in them. He confidently expected that Brender, carried away by his bitterness, would assent to this question. Thus he would at the same time confess that he himself knew the bills to be counterfeit.

"No: I did not even know they were counterfeit," replied Brender, skilfully avoiding this snare.

"What business did you have with the man who was waiting for you near the baron's house two evenings ago, when we came home from the city together?"

Brender put on an appearance of trying to summon his memory to his aid.

"No one was waiting for me," he said.

"Do you know the man?" continued Green.

"Indeed, I do not know who you mean."

"The one who was slowly walking up and down before the baron's house, waiting for you. You spoke to him when I was lingering behind for a moment."

"Ah, yes! The man asked me what time it was. I did not know him."

"And what reply did you make?"

"I told him the time."

"You did not look at your watch."

"I always have the exact time in my head."

"Even on that evening, after we had been drinking pretty deeply?"

"Certainly, at that time also: otherwise I should have looked at my watch. I have not thought of the matter since: therefore the particulars have escaped me."

"It is remarkable that no one has proclaimed himself the loser of the bills you pretend to have found."

"As you say the bills were counterfeit, it seems less remarkable to me," replied Brender. "The one who lost them would then, necessarily, be afraid of detection."

"Why did you carry a revolver this morning?" pursued Green.

"I always do that in large, strange cities, for ease of mind as well as safety."

"But you bought it here; for it bears the mark of a manufacturer residing in this city."

"Perfectly correct: I bought it here."

"Since you assert that you always carry such a weapon in strange cities, you must have had one already?"

"I had a very pretty revolver; but I sold it on my way here."

"And why?"

"Because I obtained a very high price for it, and, moreover, was embarrassed for want of money."

"Yet your savings are large enough to enable you to live at ease, as you told the maid of the baroness."

"I was only joking with the girl."

"Did you give her the ring in joke also?"

"Certainly; for it would never occur to me to marry her."

The commissary saw that the examination would lead to no result. He rang for a police-officer, and commanded him to lead the prisoner back.

Brender heard this command, and still he remained standing quietly, with his eyes fixed on Green.

"Have you any other communication to make?" asked the commissary.

"Yes: I wish to speak to my master, Capt. von Altenberg."

"He has already left the city, as I told you," replied Green.

Brender pressed his lips together, in bitterness of spirit, and silently followed the police-officer.

Green left the room. He had commissioned an officer to look up the man with whom Brender had exchanged a few words on the evening already mentioned. Per-

haps his statements would lead to the discovery of Brender's real name; or, at least, some contradictions on his part might be proved. But all the efforts of the police had hitherto been in vain. His residence could not be discovered.

Evening drew near. The commissary went to a restaurant to rest and refresh himself. He remained sitting there a long time, and then started up, in order to fulfil the promise he had given the baron of spending the night in his room.

He would gladly have devoted this night to undisturbed rest; but the thought that the mysterious thief might repeat the attempt to open the casket impelled him to resist the longing.

He walked slowly to the gate of the city, and drew near the park. With a slight exertion he sprang over the wall. All around was still. He distinctly heard the splashing of the fountain near the villa. He walked towards the house. He noticed a light still burning in the baron's room, but could not distinguish the baron, who was working at his desk. He had, then, come too early.

In order to while away the time until the baron had left his room, and betaken himself to rest, he wandered through the park. In spite of his fatigue, he did not like to sit down, for fear of falling asleep. He enjoyed the beautiful avenues as often as he walked through them. How happy must he feel who could call such a place his own!

He involuntarily thought how little he could enjoy in life. Although the fulfilment of his professional duties gave him pleasure, yet he rarely had an hour he could call entirely his own. How many sleepless nights did he spend, and what hardships was he often forced to endure, without speaking of the dangers to which he was almost daily exposed!

Habit, indeed, had made him tolerably indifferent to danger. He knew criminals well, and knew that almost all of them were cowards. The consciousness of their guilt, and of the wrongs they have committed, deprives them, in a great measure, of their courage. How often had he gone alone into the midst of the most dangerous criminals, armed only with a short-sword, to arrest one or another of them! Almost every time, he would have been lost, beyond rescue, if the men had had courage to attack him. However active and powerful his apparently feeble body was, still he would have been forced to yield to superior power.

He had often resolved to apply for a position which would allow him more rest; but, as often as he was about to carry out his resolution, he drew back. He could not give up his restless life. It seemed to hold him back by force.

He still saw through the trees the glimmer of the light in the baron's study, and therefore continued his walk. Just then, he noticed the form of a man swinging himself over the wall into the park.

He stood still in astonishment. The darkness did not allow him to recognize the form ; but he resolved, at all events, to see who it might be. Were not the various secrets which this park had already disclosed to him at an end yet ?

A moment the dark form stood still, and seemed to be listening attentively, evidently wishing to be unseen, — one reason the more for Green to follow it.

Rapidly the form passed into a dark avenue, and then turned into a side-path. It must be some one who was very familiar with the paths.

It was difficult for the commissary to follow him. Perhaps he might succeed in getting ahead of the man by a shorter cut. He quickly struck into a path that led across a grass-plot. On this soft ground he could go faster, without fear of betraying himself. He distinctly heard the steps of the unknown on the gravel-walk.

Close by the walk, concealed by the trunk of a chestnut-tree, he paused. Very cautiously he bent his head forward to see the man as he came by him. With rapid step the stranger approached. He seemed to have no suspicion that he was watched ; for he passed by, without looking aside, scarcely two steps from Green. Involuntarily the commissary started back in alarm, and stood for a moment, irresolute. He had seen the man's face quite plainly ; and yet he thought he was mistaken : he must have been mistaken. Perhaps a resemblance perplexed him. But

this was impossible ; for the resemblance extended not only to the face, but to the figure and the gait.

In the unknown man he had recognized Brender.

Swiftly did all possibilities pass through his mind. Might not the crafty criminal have escaped from prison ? What, then, was he seeking here ? Could he venture to meet one of the occupants of the villa in this place ?

It was no time to give himself up to suppositions. He must have certainty, let it cost what it would. He quickly drew off his boots, that he might not betray himself by the sound of his footsteps ; laid hold of his breast-pocket, to convince himself that he still had the short-sword, his only weapon ; and then hurried after the man. He had not been so excited for years. His heart beat so loud, that he feared it would betray him. And again doubts arose within him. Was Brender's flight from the prison, the strength of which he well knew, possible ? Had he not seen him there only a few hours before ? Was not Brender's right arm in a sling ; and would it be possible for him, disabled thus, to accomplish an escape which would be difficult under any circumstances ? Had not the man, finally, leaped over the wall with a dexterity, which, at all events, betrayed sound arms ?

All these doubts flashed through Green's mind as he followed the man, who did not approach the house, but turned into another avenue. All the more difficult was it for Green to follow him. He sprang

from one tree to another, by leaps, in order to secure a little concealment, at least; and yet the man, hurrying on before him, must have seen him if he had only looked back. He did not do it. With increased speed, he hastened to a garden-seat, threw himself on his knees, and seemed to be searching eagerly for something.

A thought arose in Green's mind, which drove away every doubt, and, without hesitation, he rushed towards the kneeling man, to seize him; for it was Brender. He drew the short-sword from his pocket, and aimed a stunning blow at the head of the criminal.

Almost at the same instant, Brender sprang up; and the blow glided off his head, leaving scarcely a mark. He uttered a half-stifled cry, as he saw his worst enemy standing before him, and rushed upon him with horrible ferocity. He must defend his freedom and his life, and at the same time satisfy his burning hatred.

Green had not gained time for a second blow. The two men struggled with the utmost exertion of their strength. The commissary felt that he was not a match for Brender, that he should be forced to yield; for the arms of his antagonist encircled him like iron braces. He knew that it was a struggle for life: nevertheless, it was not fear that drew from him a loud cry for help, but anxiety lest the dangerous criminal might escape.

At a little distance, he heard an answer to his cry for help: at the same instant he was thrown down

by Brender, and his head struck against the edge of the stone bench. Brender seized his short-sword, and dealt several blows at his head, which caused him to fall senseless.

The help which arrived at that moment came too late. George rushed to the scene of conflict. Marie's anxious cry betrayed that he had been having a late interview with his beloved.

Scarcely had Brender seen him when he sprang up, and ran away. George followed him; but the fugitive had already leaped over the wall before he reached him. In his excitement and haste, it had not been possible for George to recognize the man he was pursuing.

He returned quickly to the bench, and, to his horror, recognized the commissary in the man lying there unconscious. He tried to raise him: the blood that ran over his hands as he did so betrayed how severely Green was wounded.

He sent Marie to the house to seek assistance. Henry and the coachman came immediately; and, with their help, Green was carried into the house, still in a state of unconsciousness.

The baron also heard the cry for help, and hastened out. His alarm was great on seeing Green's condition.

In a few words, George told his master all he knew of the circumstances.

"Who attacked him?" asked Elka.

George could not answer this question: he was hardly able to

give a general description of the fugitive.

The wounds of the commissary were examined, and found to be even more severe than was at first supposed. The coachman was sent to the city to bring a physician; and Elka himself staid with the wounded man in order to take care that wet cloths should be laid upon his wounds,—the only thing he ventured to do.

In a short time, the coachman arrived with the nearest physician. His face looked doubtful as he examined the wounds.

“Are the injuries dangerous?” asked Elka.

“Yes,” replied the physician frankly. “I fear they will cause his death. There must have been fearful blows inflicted with a blunt instrument upon the unfortunate man’s head. I cannot yet tell whether the brain is injured: I fear it is.”

Elka was deeply affected. He was oppressed by the thought that the commissary might lose his life in his interest; for on his account had he come into the park.

Who could the murderer be? In vain did he seek for an answer to this question.

The physician proposed that the still unconscious man should be removed to the hospital, since he had not brought the instruments needful in making a thorough examination, and it would take time to send for them.

“I would gladly keep him in my house, and do every thing in my power for him,” replied Elka.

“He will be better off in the hospital,” said the physician. “The necessary help is there at hand, and, if it is still possible to save him, he will recover there.”

Elka yielded reluctantly to the physician’s advice; and preparations were at once made to remove the wounded man.

“Do you not intend to inform the police of this affair immediately?” asked the physician.

“Certainly, certainly!” cried Elka. He had not thought of this before, so great was his excitement; but he now gave the necessary orders to George, who was just about to leave the house, when two police-officers entered, having come to inform the commissary that Brender had escaped from prison.

They heard with consternation of the wounds their superior had received; and neither they nor Elka doubted that these were inflicted by Brender.

While Green was being conveyed to the hospital, the two officers, guided by George, examined the spot where the commissary had been attacked. The place showed signs of a violent conflict, and great loss of blood. They also examined the spot where Brender had leaped over the wall, and escaped. They took the same road by which he had fled, hoping that some object might lead them on to the track of the fugitive.

Almost the entire police-force was employed in the effort to arrest the dangerous criminal. But when, at dawn of day, the officers returned one by one to the police-

office to report the result of their exertions, not one had discovered a trace of the man they sought.

Brender's flight attracted great attention. It had been accomplished by unexampled boldness and skill, which was all the greater because he had neither tools, nor time for preparation, and could not even have known the extent of the difficulties he had to overcome. The rapidity with which the flight had been accomplished, and the luck that had attended it, added to the attention already excited.

The officers of the prison would have considered flight in such a manner impossible, had not Brender left unmistakable traces behind him.

The cell in which he was placed was one of the strongest and most secure. The walls were thick and strong; the door was covered with a heavy iron plating; and over the single window was a grating massive enough to bid defiance to human strength. But Brender chose a very different way to escape. He pushed aside the little stove in his cell, took out the funnel, enlarged the opening in the chimney until it was broad enough to crawl through; then, taking the stones he had removed, he piled them up skilfully on a wooden stool, and so climbed up the chimney.

But there he encountered an unexpected difficulty. A prisoner had formerly escaped through the chimney; and for that reason several stout iron bars had been fastened over it, cutting off all hope of flight in that way. On meeting this ob-

stacle, Brender crawled down the chimney, and let himself down a flue which led to the kitchen of the prison-inspector. It chanced that no one was in the kitchen at that time; and on Brender went, passing through the corridors, past the room of the prison-inspector, who was sitting there with his family, and entered the work-room; closed the door behind him; exchanged his clothes, blackened by the soot of the chimney, for the coat and pantaloons of the inspector; took his gold watch also, and then continued his flight through the window. Sliding down a slender water-spout, he reached the yard of an out-house, and thence made his escape by leaping over the wall.

About an hour afterwards, the inspector wished to go into his work-room, but found the door fastened, and was obliged to have it opened by a locksmith. The disappearance of his coat and pantaloons, as well as the blackened garments that had been left behind, soon explained what had happened. The sooty tracks led to the kitchen; and an examination of the cells at once betrayed who the bold fugitive was.

Many smiled at this daring and singular escape of a criminal in the garments of the prison-inspector; and there was, indeed, a touch of humor in it, which the police, however, failed to appreciate. They saw in this flight only the boldness and cunning of the criminal, and exerted themselves anew to arrest him, especially as his crimes were heightened still further by the at-

tack upon the commissary, and the fatal injuries he had received.

But all the efforts of the police were fruitless. Not the slightest trace of the fugitive was discovered; though, scarcely an hour after his escape, information concerning him was telegraphed in all directions. The most efficient policemen were convinced that he was still concealed in the city; and, for many days and nights, the search was continued, but without success.

And Green, who best knew Brender's character, and might, perhaps, have given information on several points, could not be questioned; for he lay in the hospital, struggling against death, and hardly for a moment had his consciousness returned. In the delirium of fever, he often called aloud upon Brender; and it was evident, even from his incoherent words, that the wounds had been inflicted by him: but the watcher by his bedside took not the slightest interest in the fancies of the wounded man, and gave no heed to his words.

Baron von Elka sent his servant to the hospital every day to inquire for the commissary; but weeks passed before any hope was expressed that his life might be saved. During this time, ample information concerning Brender's past history was obtained. Green had rightly suspected that Brender was not his real name. His name was Bishop. He was originally an engraver, and a very skilful workman, but had no fancy for labor of any kind. Many years before, he had been sent to the penitentiary for counter-

feiting bank-notes, and had afterwards been in various situations, without staying long in any one. The police in his native place always had a watchful eye upon him, especially as he led a dissolute, jovial life, even when he was out of employment; but no crime could be proved against him. Nevertheless, he was reported by the police as a crafty, dangerous, and suspicious man, who certainly possessed great cleverness, and, in various branches, great skill also.

Not a trace of him had yet been found.

Meanwhile, Arthur had almost entirely recovered: at least, he was quite out of danger, though still weak. In no small measure did he owe his life to Alice, who had cared for him with unwearying constancy, and now experienced double joy at his recovery.

It was a bright, still autumn morning. The freshness of summer still rested upon the grass-plots and flower-beds in the park, as the skill of the gardener resisted the influence of autumn as long as possible; but its power was seen in the brilliant foliage of the trees, and the yellow leaves that were borne to the ground, as if in sport, by every breath of wind. But all the more plainly was the clear blue of heaven to be seen through the tree-tops, and all the more cheerily did the sunbeams force their way through the lightened branches.

For the first time, the physician had allowed Arthur to go out into the park, that he might be invigorated by the fresh, pure air. Sup-

ported by Alice and George, he slowly descended the stairs. He had felt perfectly well while in his room; but he now realized how hard it was to make the slightest exertion, and that he was still very far from the recovery of his old strength and elasticity.

With great difficulty he concealed his weakness, in order that no shadow might fall upon the happy spirit of Alice. She cried aloud with joy when they had left the house, and she led her lover into the warm sunshine. Bluer and higher than ever before seemed the heavens to her, purer the air, and warmer the sunshine. She herself had been deprived of all this for weeks. It seemed to her as if she were celebrating the day of her own recovery, so light and happy was her heart, from which all anguish had at last been removed.

In the joy and exuberance of youth, she would have liked to run over the green turf with Arthur, and sport as they had in their childhood; but now she walked slowly by his side, watching anxiously over him.

George brought chairs for them; and they sat down in the warm sunshine, clasping each other's hands. The fresh air brought a tinge of color to Arthur's face: his eyes gained new brilliancy.

"See!" cried Alice, noticing this, "your cheeks have color already: in a few days we can ride together, and you shall show me the place in the forest where that wicked man shot you."

A sorrowful smile passed over Arthur's face.

"And your cheeks have grown pale," he replied. "If I had dreamed that I should bring so much suffering upon you! But, even then, I could not have acted otherwise: my honor was insulted. I could not avoid this step."

"You men are foolish beings," said Alice. "You create phantoms, and make yourselves slaves to them. Is your honor, then, different from ours? Might not we women, also, fight duels, when we feel offended or insulted? Perhaps you think we do not feel insults as keenly as yourselves; but we bear them, rather than try to expiate them by such folly."

Arthur smilingly tried to gainsay her words.

"Hush!" interrupted Alice sportively: "you cannot convince me that you men are not simpletons. The captain insults you: you fight a duel with him. He wounds you severely; you lie for weeks at the gate of death, while he goes off merrily: now the insult is atoned for; your injured honor is restored. If you had wounded him, and he had been forced to bear all the suffering you have endured, then only should I see any sense in it."

"He would willingly have borne it, if he had had such a nurse," replied Arthur. "I am sure he envies me."

"You are only evading the subject," exclaimed Alice. "You wish to shield yourself by flattering words, since you cannot refute my accusation."

"I can refute it as soon as you allow that man's position in life is very different from woman's. Dueling may be a folly; but this folly has become a universal sentiment, which time, perhaps, will change, but against which an individual cannot contend."

"Indeed, Arthur," interrupted Alice earnestly, "an individual can and must do this, as soon as he sees that the universal sentiment is false; that it is nothing but a prejudice. It is far more courageous to take a decided stand against prejudice than to submit to it."

"Are not you women, also, oppressed by a host of prejudices?" said Arthur. "Can you free yourselves from them?"

"We are the weak sex, and you call yourselves the strong."

"This, also, is a prejudice. Struggle against it. Prove that women are much stronger in endurance than men; that they understand far better how to rule, for most men, indeed, are under their dominion. Unfurl your banner openly."

"No, no!" cried Alice, clinging to him tenderly: "our dominion can only be likened to the little flag that flutters gayly at the top of the mast; but the banner that is hoisted in the hour of danger, that gives to the ship its name and its importance,—that is the will of man. In the tranquil harbor he may, in sport as it were, submit to the wishes of the woman; but, in the storm of life, he must be the ruler, and sit at the helm."

"Alice, will you yield to my will in respect to the happiest, the most

important hour of my life?" asked Arthur.

A delicate blush covered Alice's face. She knew he meant the hour in which they should be forever united.

"Arthur, let us speak of that when you are entirely well."

"My heart is well," cried the young man. "If it were not strong, it could not bear the fervor with which it loves you: it would be consumed by it."

Alice was silent, and looked down thoughtfully.

"See," continued Arthur, "your father knows of our love; he has silently sanctioned it; and yet I long to speak to him. He is so good, I am firmly convinced that he will not oppose our happiness."

"He will not," said Alice assuringly. "He has always been kind and good to me. I am only afraid that his own happiness has received a blow. His brow is always clouded now; and I have never seen him so depressed."

"Perhaps he has some serious business-trouble," said Arthur.

Alice shook her head doubtfully.

"It is not that; for he has never betrayed such troubles,—at least, in his family-circle."

At this moment the baron appeared in one of the avenues, and, seeing Arthur, hastened towards him with a smile upon his face.

"Good luck to you!" cried he, stretching out his hand. "Air and sunshine are the best remedies for you, especially as you are accustomed to both."

Arthur grasped his uncle's hand

warmly, and looked at him with a grateful expression.

What would have become of him if Elka had not received him so kindly, and he had been deprived of Alice's care?

"I feel wonderfully invigorated already," he replied.

"Now, Alice, give Arthur up to me for a little while," said Elka. "I have a few things to say to him."

Alice looked at him anxiously. "Have no fears, my child," continued Elka. "Arthur can bear what I have to say to him."

Alice went away.

Elka seated himself in her chair, and, after a short silence, said, "I have received a singular letter, containing interesting revelations concerning the character of Capt. Altenberg. It comes from a person in whom I have no special confidence; but the information seems to have an air of truth. The letter is from the captain's servant, — the same man who was arrested for passing counterfeit money, and escaped from prison so boldly. He seems very much embittered against the captain, and represents him in the worst colors. According to his account, the captain hated you, because Alice rejected him, and loved you. He had intended to have you put out of the way secretly, and intimated this design to his servant; but he had no fancy for undertaking such a dangerous deed, especially as he was convinced, that, after it was accomplished, the captain would deliver him up to justice in order to avert suspicion from himself. This fear was well ground-

ed, for Altenberg possesses neither honor nor conscience: he is a man who yields without restraint to the sway of passion. By his order, Brender found out the place of your abode. Altenberg followed you to the restaurant with the intention of insulting and challenging you. Relying upon his skill in shooting, he confidently expected to kill you. He even consulted his second as to the surest way of causing death, — whether he should aim at the head or the breast."

A flush of indignation overspread Arthur's face.

Elka noticed this.

"Arthur, I hope you will be reasonable enough to listen to this without excitement," said he.

"It does not excite me," said Arthur; while the blood coursing swiftly through his veins contradicted the assertion. "The captain's conduct was infamous; and I trust he will hereafter give me an opportunity to punish him."

"Just because I was afraid of this, have I told you all," interrupted Elka. "I hope you will become more composed, and agree with me that the captain is worthy only of contempt, and is in no condition to demand or to give satisfaction. Should your path again cross his, show that you despise him. You know I have not reproached you on account of the duel; but now you have other duties, and I hope that Alice's happiness will be of more importance to you than any thought of hatred or revenge."

"Yes!" cried Arthur with passionate fervor. "Alice's happiness

shall be the only object of my life. I have not yet spoken to you of my love, have not yet asked for Alice's hand; but I should have done it to-day, even without this suggestion."

"Have you not already received my silent consent?" said Elka. "Should I have allowed Alice to take care of you, had I not been willing that she should be yours? You know her, and know that she possesses qualities to make a man happy."

"I shall be happy with her, and will do every thing, every thing, to make her happy also," cried Arthur in joyful excitement. "Ask her, years hence, if I have fulfilled my promise; ask her without my knowledge: and, if she says she is not happy, then call me a liar."

Elka smiled.

"Arthur, I doubt not the fidelity and uprightness of your heart. I have now a communication to make, which you may not have expected. I know you have but little property, and that your small estate will only suffice, by good management, to keep you from the anxieties of life. You may have counted upon Alice's dowry to improve your circumstances."

"O uncle! I have never thought of that," interrupted Arthur.

"Let me finish quietly," continued Elka. "I think it would be very natural for you to count upon it. I know you, indeed, too well, to suspect that you love Alice only on account of her property. Do not misunderstand me. You will assure me that you love Alice for herself alone, and I believe you

fully: nevertheless, you would be perfectly justified in your hope of a dowry, because it would enable you to make her life more agreeable, and she is spoiled in many respects. Arthur, you cannot rely upon me for any assistance at present. I once had considerable property; but I have sacrificed it to my position. I did it in the expectation of reaching a higher station. My hope has been disappointed: I have sacrificed my property in vain. Yes: other circumstances have compelled me to ask a dismissal from my post; and my request has been very promptly granted."

These last words he spoke with a bitter smile.

"You are not still to be ambassador?" asked Arthur in astonishment.

"No," replied Elka. "I myself asked to be removed from this position; but I certainly did not expect the request to be so speedily granted. I hoped they would seek to remove the cause which led to my request; for I have sacrificed not only my property, but my best powers, to this position. I hoped, at least, for justice in the weighing of my deserts: more I did not expect. But Minister von Altenberg, the captain's father, seems to have taken pleasure in granting this request at once, though he has neglected so many others."

"And you will not remain here?" continued Arthur, who did not yet seem to comprehend his uncle's words.

"My circumstances forbid me to stay here," replied Elka. "The remnant of my fortune will give me enough to live on; but I shall be forced to retrench. For this I care not; but I am also compelled to see the destruction of all my plans and hopes: all that is over."

He passed his hand over his brow, as if he would blot out these last thoughts.

Arthur sought to comfort him; but Elka was lost in thought, and scarcely heeded his words.

"Let it go," said he, rousing himself at length. "Perhaps rest and retirement will bestow upon me what I have vainly tried for years to attain in another way,—a spirit of content. Fate is, perhaps, wiser than I, hard though it seems. I had become blinded by ambition: it is the most unhappy passion, because it never leads to perfect satisfaction; the consuming fire burns ever on. Even when a man has reached the highest possible aim of his desires, comes the fear that a sudden storm may overthrow him, and the hard-won place be lost. In all the bitterness that still fills my mind, a strange peace has come over me, which I ascribe to the assured hope that I have at last found an escape from the confusion of life. Alice knows nothing of all this. It is painful for me to tell her; for I should at the same time be obliged to confess that I have wasted the fortune to which my only child had a claim; that I might have kept it for her if I had lived more prudently, and had not

been deceived in my calculations. It is bitter to a father to make such a confession to his child: Arthur, tell her all. It will not sound so harsh from your lips; and perhaps your kind heart may find some ground of justification for me which I cannot bring to bear myself. It is a comfort to me to know that Alice is now under the shelter of your love."

"Uncle," cried Arthur, grasping Elka's hand, "I have but little that I can offer you. But I am young, I have strength and willingness to work; and this strength I place always at your disposal."

A sad smile flitted over Elka's face.

"I thank you for your offer; but I am not so badly off as you think. I have not yet looked into my affairs very thoroughly; but I hope to save enough to raise me above the anxieties of life. Perhaps I shall succeed in selling this estate for a higher price than I expect. One thing more. I hope you will soon be strong enough to return to your home. It is not my intention to drive you away from here; but I wish to spare Alice and her mother the discomfort of the days that are before me. You will do me a favor if you can induce them to accompany you, and keep them until every thing is arranged here. I hope it will not be hard for you to exercise hospitality towards Alice," he added with a smile. "Neither Alice nor her mother must suspect that I desire their removal; for I fear anxiety on my account would urge them to stay here."

Arthur joyfully promised to do as his uncle wished.

“May I then hope, uncle, that I can soon keep Alice with me always?” he cried.

“Yes,” replied Elka; “as soon as your house is made ready to receive a young lady, and Alice is inclined to stay with you. There she comes. She seems to consider our conversation too long. Ask her. I suspect, indeed, that you two have long been agreed as to this question: now we are also.”

He then rose, and, after addressing a sportive word to Alice, went into the house.

The commissary had so far recovered, that he was able, one pleasant day, to leave the hospital. The toughness of his constitution surmounted his severe injuries sooner than could have been expected.

As soon as his condition allowed him to think calmly, his mind dwelt much on the baron's lost despatch, Brender's flight, and his attack upon himself. In order to shorten the time as he lay upon the bed of sickness, in the sleepless hours of night, he recalled to his memory all the details of the case which had been made known to him, weighed every possibility again and again; and an entirely new supposition in regard to the despatches arose in his mind. But, whether this supposition could be verified, he did not yet know.

One point especially absorbed his thoughts, and excited his impatience to the highest pitch.

When Brender, on the evening

of his escape from prison, hastened to the baron's park, and knelt down by the stone bench, it was evident that he wished to take away something that he had hidden there. Green hardly doubted that this was the money he had received in exchange for the counterfeit bills, and perhaps other bills also.

Had Brender, after hurling him to the ground, found time to take these things with him, or not? Could he have got them afterwards? These questions continually recurred to the commissary's mind. He might have procured positive information by sending a police-officer to make an examination; but he could not forego the satisfaction of doing this himself.

The uncertainty which had tortured him so long gave him no peace; and he had no sooner left the hospital than he entered a carriage, and was driven towards the baron's estate.

Slowly he walked through the park; for he was still too weak to quicken his pace. He looked up at the windows of the house: all was unchanged; but silence seemed to have fallen upon the place, and he did not even see one of the servants. The dry leaves rustled under his feet as he walked through the avenues. It occurred to him that the gardener, who used to be so painfully particular, had not removed them; but he was too uneasy to give further thought to the matter. At length, he stood by the stone bench, where he had so often longed to be.

Forcibly shaking off the remem-

branches which crowded upon him at the sight of this place, he knelt down by the bench to examine it. The wind had heaped the dry leaves upon it. He brushed them off; and his hand, trembling with impatience, groped about under the bench: it found nothing. He examined the ground; it was firm everywhere, and did not seem to have been disturbed for years. But he would not give up the search so easily. Since his hand had tried in vain, he bent his head under the bench, that he might be convinced by his own eyes that nothing was hidden under the stone. For a moment he waited, until his eye became accustomed to the dim light; and then he saw the glimmer of a paper in the crevice between the stone slab and the back of the bench. He quickly drew it out; and a cry of joy involuntarily escaped him as he held in his hand a small package carefully wrapped in paper.

He had found what he was looking for, what had so often filled his thoughts. Without giving himself time to rise, he opened the package on his knees, in the very place where he had been brought so near to death.

His hand trembled with excitement; his eye flashed. He found a large number of bank-notes, and also a quantity of counterfeit bills, just as he had expected. He did not stop to count the money; for the package contained several other papers, which claimed his whole attention.

The first one that he opened was

a passport, made out in Brender's name, which was to have aided him in his flight. The second was a letter. This Green ran over hurriedly, and then looked up in astonishment, as if he could not trust his eyes. Once more he read it slowly, while his eyes sparkled with joy.

The letter ran thus: —

“DEAR BROTHER, — I have sent a copy of the despatches to the editor of the — newspaper. He read it with the greatest delight, and pays well for it. It will be published in about a fortnight, and will attract great attention. I have been obliged to demand this delay, because your carelessness has placed me in a very embarrassing position. You exchanged your copy of the key for the original, and took that with you. Fortunately, the minister has noticed nothing yet. Send me the original by return of mail. Mark it as a valuable paper, that it may come safely, so that I can exchange it for the copy. When this is done, we need not fear discovery. By the article in the paper, suspicion will be excited that the despatches have been made public by the ambassador, or through some fault of his. Send me the original key. Albert will betray nothing. With best greetings,
YOUR BROTHER.”

The commissary hardly believed his eyes. The contents of the letter did not puzzle him for an instant. It was directed to Wies-

baden, where Brender had been, with his master, before Altenberg's visit to the baron. The postmark gave the date on which the letter had been mailed, and on which it had reached Wiesbaden. Both were prior to the loss of the baron's despatches.

This unexpected turn of the affair excited Green so much, that he was obliged to sit down on the bench, and try to recover his composure. At length he rose, and went towards the house, in order to inform the baron of his discovery.

As he entered, Elka sprang to meet him with outstretched hand.

"Here you are again!" he cried, with an expression of the most sincere interest. "I have been very anxious about you. Have you entirely recovered? You still look pale."

"I have escaped this time," said Green, with a smile. "If my skull had not been so thick, it would have been completely shattered. The physician told me to-day, that at first he would not have given a penny for my chance of life. We see that even the best physicians may be deceived."

"Let us rejoice that he was mistaken," exclaimed Elka. "The thought that you might lose your life in my interest has troubled me more than you imagine."

"I thank you for your interest," answered Green. "I can at least testify that I have not forgotten your affairs, even on the bed of sickness. They have occupied my thoughts largely. How is it about

the despatches? Is there no explanation yet?"

"Let us drop this subject," said Elka. "I am trying to forget an affair which will always be a mystery to me."

"Are you so firmly convinced that it will never be explained?" asked Green, with a smile.

Elka shrugged his shoulders.

"I am," he gravely replied. "You do not know how decidedly this has influenced my whole life. It was owing to the loss of the despatches, that I gave up my post as ambassador. You look upon me in astonishment. I am speaking the truth. I have left my public life, and shall live, henceforth, only as a simple citizen. I sold this place yesterday: in a few days I shall leave the city, and, in all probability, shall never return. I should have visited you, in the hospital, before my departure. Many changes have taken place since last we met. You can understand that one does not willingly abandon hopes which he has cherished for long years, on which his whole life was built; and yet I am now satisfied with my condition. A heavy weight of duties is taken from my shoulders. I think my life will be happier and more peaceful without them."

"Herr Baron, will you permit me to ask a few more questions?" said Green.

Elka bowed his head in assent.

"Was the publication of the despatches the cause of your withdrawing from your position?"

Elka replied in the affirmative.

"And if I should now prove that your despatches have not been published, that no reproach touches you!" exclaimed the commissary.

Elka looked up in surprise: his eyes flashed, and betrayed greater emotion than he liked to show.

"How can that be possible?" said he.

"You told me, that, besides yourself, Minister von Altenberg alone knew about the despatches."

"Very true; but I do not understand" —

"What if the despatches had been stolen from the minister?" said Green.

Elka shook his head.

"No, no: that is not to be thought of! How do you come to this supposition?"

"It is no supposition: read this letter."

As the baron's eye ran over the letter, his cheek flushed, his hand trembled perceptibly. He sprang up.

"Where did you get this letter?" he hurriedly inquired.

Green told him where he found it.

"And you think it is genuine; that it contains the truth?"

"There is no doubt of it. You know the man to whom these lines are addressed is not called Brender, but Bishop; and his brother is in the employment of Minister von Altenberg. This letter was written before your despatches disappeared: the same paper that you described to me is mentioned there. Every thing combines to make my

supposition undoubted truth. Those were not your despatches that were published."

"You are right!" cried Elka, seizing Green's hand in joyful excitement. "Herr Commissary, perhaps you do not imagine how great a service you have rendered me through this letter. What is done cannot, indeed, be undone; neither do I desire it: but this letter is a comfort to me. I was answerable for the despatches, and could only repel the reproach that came upon me on account of the harshness with which it was expressed. Now I can throw back the censure also: it falls upon him who has improved this opportunity to show his enmity to me. This letter is the most satisfactory thing that I could have received; for it places a powerful weapon in my hand. I thank you for it."

The commissary smiled.

"Do not thank me; for fortunate chance alone placed the letter in my hand. You may remember that I once mentioned this possibility to you."

"I wonder at your penetration. But what has become of my despatches? Could the thief have been prevented from using them only on account of their publication by another party? The same mystery puzzles me still."

"Even this I hope yet to solve," replied Green.

Elka looked at him inquiringly.

"You know how disagreeably I was prevented from carrying out my intention of watching in your room," continued Green. "Has

any attempt to open the casket been made since then?"

"Several times, and in the same mysterious manner. But the effort was unsuccessful; for I have put a bit of wax in the key every evening. An invisible thief seems to hover around me at night."

"Herr Baron, your despatches have not been stolen," said Green, smiling.

Elka looked at him in amazement. He did not comprehend his words.

"Have you never been conscious of walking in your sleep?" asked the commissary.

The baron was startled.

"Certainly. I suffered from that in my youth."

"And later?" pursued Green.

"I have never again been aware of it."

"Yet it would not be impossible that this diseased condition should return. Your nervous system seems to be very much exhausted. You sleep alone: therefore no one has had an opportunity to watch you. Herr Baron, I am convinced that you have yourself taken the despatches from the casket while in a state of somnambulism."

Elka paced up and down the room in great excitement. Was not the commissary's theory possible? Had he not for some time been conscious of a tension of the nerves, the cause of which was inexplicable to him?

"Where could I have left the despatches, if I had taken them from the casket myself?" he asked half-doubtfully, half-sharing the commissary's conviction.

"That I cannot tell; but I should search this room. May you not have hidden them in some place?"

"Then I should have found them already," interrupted Elka.

"Allow me to remind you, that somnambulists often act with a caution and cunning of which they would be incapable in their waking hours."

"But what could have led me to remove the despatches that have caused me so much anxiety and vexation?"

"In the very importance of the despatches, it seems to me, lies the reason why your mind should be occupied with them in this diseased condition."

Still Elka paced up and down the room.

"You have placed a theory before me which has much to support it, which would solve this great mystery; and yet my mind instinctively recoils from it."

"May not this be merely the effect of the unexpected solution?" said Green. "I think it is very natural, if the thought that you have caused yourself so much uneasiness is unpleasant to you, that you should, as it were, recoil from it."

"I would willingly have borne this uneasiness if I could be sure that the despatches have never fallen into other hands."

"I hope this may become certainty."

"How will you make it possible?"

"We will try to find the place

where you have hidden the despatches."

"And in what way?"

"You have so often tried to open the casket, that you will surely repeat the attempt. We will remove the wax from the key, so that you can unlock the casket. I will stay here at night to watch you; and I am convinced, that, if you take any thing out, you will hide it in the same place where you have concealed the despatches."

The wisdom of this suggestion was obvious to the baron. Only one fear arose in his mind.

"And if the diseased condition in which you think I have done all this does not return?"

"The excitement into which you have been thrown by my communication makes it only too probable that it will return," answered Green.

"I shall be here but a few days longer," said Elka.

"Then there is all the greater need that we should carry out our plan without delay, and make an attempt this very night."

"You are still too weak: I cannot allow you to expose yourself to so much fatigue and excitement."

"Have no fears. I shall not have to enter by way of the window: my strength would not be equal to that, certainly. I am not afraid of the excitement; and, if you will permit me, I can make myself very comfortable here."

"Arrange every thing as you please. You have done and suffered so much for me, that I can never repay you."

"I have only done my duty," answered Green, modestly evading the baron's praise. "May I ask what has become of your nephew? No news from him has reached me in the hospital."

The baron's face brightened, as Green led his thoughts to Arthur.

"He has recovered entirely, and gone back to his estate. My wife and daughter accompanied him, and I hope to follow them in a few days. He is to marry my daughter in a short time: I hope they will be a very happy couple."

The commissary left the house, promising to return in the evening. Elka remained alone in his room, thinking over the commissary's theory. If it should prove true; if the despatches had not been stolen from him, and he should succeed in finding them! What satisfaction to hurl back upon the minister his own harsh, bitter words of reproach, to prove that the despatches had been stolen from the minister himself, that the charge of negligence touched not him, but Altenberg!

Restless, excited, he paced up and down his room. Doubts arose in his mind: he tried to suppress them. He searched every part of the room, the secretary, the bookcase,—all in vain. At length he went out into the garden in order to pass away the time, and master the uneasiness that had taken possession of him. It no longer pained him that he was so soon to leave forever the home in which he had lived for years. A wealthy American, who was particularly pleased

with the situation, had bought the estate a few days before, and paid a much higher price than the baron expected, — more, indeed, than the place was worth.

His prospects for the future were thus brightened; for he could now live quietly on the remnant of his fortune, and would be subjected to fewer deprivations than he had feared.

Slowly the evening drew near. Green came early to fulfil his promise. "I am still obliged to avoid the night air," said he, and was about to take a seat in the ante-room until the baron had retired to rest.

But Elka would not consent to this.

"You have rendered me a greater service than a friend ever has," said he. "Come, we will chat until we are tired, and drink a glass of wine. I still have some in the cellar that you can bear; for it is pure and old, — the genuine kind for invalids."

The two were soon seated in the baron's library, and before them stood glasses of pearling wine. Choice cigars added to their enjoyment. Green had not believed the baron capable of being so amiable, friendly, and attentive. The commissary told stories drawn from his experience as a police-officer, and purposely chose the most mysterious subjects in order to produce a state of still greater excitement in the baron's mind. He wished to excite his nerves in the expectation that their diseased condition would the more surely be manifested during sleep.

At length Elka withdrew into his sleeping-room, and locked the door as he was in the habit of doing every night. By Green's express request, he did not depart in any way from his usual custom.

Green lay down on the sofa with the firm intention of going to sleep, feeling confident that the slightest noise, or the appearance of a light, would wake him. He had always been a remarkably light sleeper, especially when his nerves were excited; and the experience of this day had affected him in an extraordinary manner, owing to his state of weakness.

There he lay; but sleep fled from him. Silence reigned in the house, in which, besides the baron, no one was present except George and Marie. Marie had undertaken to pack the things belonging to the baroness; and George would not leave his master as long as he was in the city. All the other servants had been dismissed.

The thought of all he had experienced and suffered since he first entered this house, involuntarily passed through Green's mind. He had been sent hither by the chief of police to search for the lost despatches; and perhaps he would never have accomplished this task had not chance or fortune aided him. He must call it luck, that he had surprised Brender at the very moment when he was about to take away his hidden treasures, even though that luck had brought him nigh to death, and caused him many painful hours. How could he have dreamed at

that time, that the crime which he was commissioned to discover would be explained in the way that he now confidently expected! One anxiety alone oppressed him,—that the condition of the baron, which was to raise the veil from this mystery, would not return. Elka now looked much more calmly upon the events that had exercised such an important influence upon his life. After all the days of excitement and vexation, he looked forward to a tranquil existence. He was like a mariner who has exerted all his powers to prevent the shipwreck of the vessel that bears the hopes of his life, but who, when the ship is dashed to pieces upon a reef, in calm submission builds a simple hut upon the shore, inwardly rejoicing that he need no longer trust his happiness and his life to the stormy, treacherous waves.

These thoughts excited Green more than was agreeable to him. He lay with closed eyes; but rest brought him no refreshment. All was silent in the house. Without, the wind whistled through the tree-tops, which were so deeply tinged with the hues of autumn. He thought he could hear the gentle rustling of falling leaves.

Elka seemed to be asleep: at least, not a sound came from his room. Hours had already passed since he lay down to sleep. Impatience finally seized the commissary; and he was about to rise, in order, by change of position, to lessen his mental restlessness, when the door of the baron's sleeping-

room was softly opened. A form glided noiselessly through the door, and then closed it again. Only dimly could Green distinguish the outline of a figure against the window. He lay motionless, holding his breath. His blood, which usually flowed so calmly, coursed swiftly, excitedly, through his veins; and he almost feared the beating of his heart would betray him. The figure that he saw was not that of the baron. It looked smaller, more graceful, as it stood listening at the door.

Green arose so softly, that the sharpest ear would not have been able to hear him. His hand trembled with excitement. The mystery seemed to receive a different solution from what he had expected. Who was the intruder? How had it come into the baron's room? These questions flitted through his mind.

The figure advanced a few steps into the room: again it paused. Suddenly a match flashed up. By the transient light, Green recognized the form: it was Marie. He started indeed, in surprise, but remained in his motionless position.

The little match cast a faint, pale light upon the face of the girl, who had no suspicion of the commissary's presence. But, as the match burned more brightly, Marie glanced rapidly through the room. Her eyes met Green's: she started in terror, a cry escaped her; while the match and some other object fell from her hand. She recovered herself quickly, and

was about to hasten to the door; but Green anticipated her, and reached the door at a single bound.

"Stop!" he cried, seizing the girl's hand. "Not one step from this spot!"

Elka's voice was heard from the next room.

"Almighty God! The baron!" cried Marie in a faint voice, struggling to free herself; but Green held her fast. Excitement lent wonderful strength to his still feeble frame.

"What are you looking for in this room?" he cried. "What fell to the floor with that rattling sound?"

The girl did not answer.

At this moment, the baron entered the room with a light. Green's eye glanced quickly over the floor, on which he soon found a gold watch and key.

"Herr Baron, the mystery has received another solution," cried he.

Elka paused in consternation when he saw Marie.

"Impossible, impossible!" he exclaimed. "Marie — You!"

"The proof of her guilt lies there on the floor," said Green, pointing to the watch.

Marie threw herself down before the baron, and clasped his knees.

"You have stolen the despatches from the casket," continued Green. "You opened it with this key on the watch-chain."

The girl made no reply, but tried to hide her face from the baron as well as the commissary.

Elka could find no words to express his astonishment. The expression of sorrow on his face was not to be mistaken.

"How did you come here?" he asked at length.

Marie persisted in her silence.

"Well, the discovery ought not to be very difficult for us," observed Green, as he took the light, which the baron still held in his hand, and went into the sleeping-room. "Ah, the way is found already!" he exclaimed, when he had glanced around the room. In the tapestry that covered the walls of the apartment a panel was pushed aside: it formed a secret door.

More closely still did Marie clasp the baron's knees.

"Mercy, mercy! I will confess all" she sobbed.

The commissary was used to such tears, and attached but little weight to them.

"Where are the despatches you have taken from the casket?" he sternly asked.

"There, there!" cried the guilty one, pointing to the secret door.

Without delay, Green followed the direction of her hand. He pushed the panel back still farther, and passed through without difficulty.

"Ha! here we have what we have so long sought in vain," he cried, returning to the room. In his right hand were several papers: which he held out towards Elka.

"The despatches!" exclaimed the baron, after glancing at them. He took them hurriedly, and read them over.

"They are, they are the despatches!" he cried. "Unhappy one, what did you intend to do with them? or what have you done already?" said he, turning to Marie, who still knelt before him, covering her face with both hands.

"I will confess all, all, but to you alone," she cried.

Elka looked inquiringly at Green.

He understood the glance.

"I think my presence will not be necessary," he said.

Elka motioned to Marie to follow him to the library; while Green remained in the sleeping-room, examining the secret door in the tapestry. It was constructed with the greatest skill, and, when closed, could not be seen from within. It opened into a narrow passage, which led to another room, tapestried in the same manner. It seemed as if the walls of these rooms were hung with tapestry only to conceal the passage that connected them.

Could the baron have been ignorant of this passage? Must he not have known that Marie was familiar with it also? The baron had not denied, indeed, that some relation existed between the maid and himself.

The commissary was filled with indignation. The baron seemed to have duped him: at least, he had not told the truth when he assured him that Marie had never been in his room at night.

Green paced back and forth in excitement. Marie hurried by him

with flushed cheeks, and left the room.

"Herr Commissary," said Elka, appearing at the door, "the mystery is at length solved, and I owe you an explanation. Pray come in here."

Silently Green took a seat opposite the baron. What explanation could Elka give him? Could he believe the words of this man? Would it not be for his interest to soften, so far as possible, the guilt of his beloved?

He was struck by the composure of Elka's manner.

"Herr Commissary," began Elka, "you possess my fullest confidence: I consider your character thoroughly honorable, and have no hesitation, therefore, in informing you of an affair, which, as you can easily see, is very painful to me. You may remember that you surprised me in an interview with my wife's maid in the summer-house, and that you intimated to me your suspicion that I was carrying on an intrigue with her. I suffered this suspicion to rest upon me: I did not contradict it, because upon that depended the preservation of a far more painful secret. Herr Commissary, it is true that I had an appointed meeting with Marie; but it concerned no love-affair, for I have never had one with her: one word will drive every doubt from your mind. Marie is my natural daughter."

Green looked at Elka in astonishment.

A sad smile passed over the baron's face.

"Few, indeed, leave a youth behind them which is free from faults and follies," he continued. "Marie was born before I was married. Her mother died a few years afterwards. It would not have been difficult to deny the relation in which I stood to the child; for the only witness was dead: but I could not abandon the helpless being to fate; I could not expose to destruction the child in whose veins my blood flowed. For many years, I cared for her in secret, and tried to bring her up well in order to insure her future happiness. When Marie was grown up, I persuaded my wife to take her for her maid. I could venture upon this step because I thought Marie had no suspicion of the relation in which I stood to her. I was moved to this course by the desire to have Marie always under my eye. It would then attract less attention if I should show a warm interest in her fate. I thought I was acting very cautiously, so that the happiness of my marriage, and the peace of my wife, would in no way be disturbed; but human wisdom is so often wrecked by accidents, by insignificant trifles which one cannot foresee!

"As Marie has just informed me, she knew that she was my child. She has often seen me reading the despatches; and the care with which I always locked them up aroused in her the suspicion that they contained the mystery of her birth, concerning which she herself knew but a few vague rumors. The longing to procure certainty on this

point, and the thought of possessing proof against me in case she should ever need my support,—all this led the thoughtless girl to take the papers from me. How this was accomplished I need not tell you. Accident had made known to her the secret passage leading to my sleeping-room."

"Had you no knowledge of this passage yourself?" interrupted Green.

"No," replied Elka. "Otherwise, I should have sooner discovered the way in which the despatches were stolen from me."

"Has Marie allowed any one to look at the despatches?" asked Green.

"She assures me that no one but herself knows about them; and I believe her, because, up to this hour, she was convinced that the papers related to her and her birth. Herr Commissary, you do not seem to trust her word."

"I have no right to question her truthfulness," replied Green; "but you know, Herr Baron, how easily a police-officer doubts. We are all pessimists: we become such through our profession and our experience. This solution of the mystery is all the more surprising to me because I had expected such a different explanation: of course, I admit that I have been mistaken. I can easily understand the adroitness of the girl in accomplishing the theft the first time; but the boldness with which the attempt was so often repeated is incomprehensible to me."

"I asked her about that," re-

plied Elka. "The fact that I did not mention the disappearance of the papers, and the repeated attempts to open the casket, gave her confidence. The foolish child thought I knew nothing about it. Herr Commissary, I believe her. I have one more particular request to make of you. You understand how much depends upon keeping secret all that I have confided to you. The happiness of my family depends upon it. You know I have withdrawn from public life in order to live wholly for them: it would therefore be doubly painful if my family relations should be disturbed."

"Herr Baron, this request was not needed," broke in Green.

"For Marie's sake, also, I should be glad to have no one hear of her foolish, thoughtless step," continued Elka. "She is soon to marry my servant George; and I do not wish her wedded life to be disturbed by discord from the beginning. Her own interest will compel her to be silent on the subject."

Green assured him that his lips should never betray any thing.

"Now, one thing more, Herr Commissary," continued Elka. "You have rendered me such infinite service, have suffered so much on my account, that I do not know how I can ever prove my gratitude. It would give me sincere pleasure if I could be of use to you."

"I have only done my duty," answered Green modestly. "It is also a satisfaction to me, that I can now announce to my superior the

accomplishment of the task imposed upon me."

"I shall do that myself," broke in Elka. "I will go to the chief of police to-morrow to thank him for intrusting this case to you. May I offer you the casket as a token of remembrance?"

Green bowed gratefully.

"Here is the key to it," went on Elka, passing him the valuable gold watch, together with the chain on which the little key hung.

The commissary was about to take off the key.

"Leave it on," begged the baron: "it is accustomed to be worn on this chain. Pray do not reject this little memento. The crystal is broken, indeed; but the watch is still going. It is good: I have worn it for years."

A slight flush passed over Green's face.

"Shall I not be suspected of having aimed at a reward?" he asked with some hesitation.

"No!" cried Elka. "No one who knows you can entertain such suspicion. Say, confidently, that the watch is a token from a friend, who owes you much, very much. But now you must rest; for your pale cheeks betray to me that you have already exerted yourself beyond your strength. George will conduct you to a room where you can sleep undisturbed."

Without waiting for an answer, he rang for his servant, and ordered him to show the commissary to the room which Altenberg had occupied. Shaking Green's hand, he then wished him good-night.

All desire for sleep had left Elka. He was in a state of excitement which he could not repress, and walked up and down the room, giving way to the thoughts that whirled through his brain. It was now in his power to hurl back upon the minister the censure he had received from him; and he was firmly resolved to do so.

Without delay, he seated himself at his writing-desk, and drew up a letter to Altenberg, using the very words the minister had employed in writing to him. When morning began to dawn, a carefully-sealed packet lay on his desk, containing his letter to Altenberg, the recovered despatches and the key, the letter to Brender which had been found by Green, and the one he had himself received with reference to the minister's son.

Months had passed.

It was a mild, pleasant winter day. Elka and Arthur were returning from the chase, with their rifles on their shoulders. Fortune had not favored them, for they had not shot any thing; but they seemed, nevertheless, to be in the happiest, merriest frame of mind. They had gone into the woods more for the sake of enjoying the pleasant day than to shoot game.

One could hardly recognize the baron. His form seemed to have become more vigorous and elastic; his cheeks wore the hue of health; and the expression of nervous irritation had entirely disappeared from his face. What a change had

taken place in both men in this short time!

Arthur had become Alice's husband, and was enjoying a fulness of happiness of which he had once hardly dared to dream.

Elka lived on Arthur's estate, and was resolved to spend his last days there. A country-seat that had formerly belonged to the estate became vacant by the sudden death of its owner; and this Elka had purchased with the remnant of his fortune, and joined it once more to Arthur's property. He, too, was happy. Rest seemed good to him; and he found great pleasure in sharing with Arthur the cares and labors of domestic life. Since he had been here, he had for the first time experienced the full enjoyment of a peaceful, happy family life.

The two now walked swiftly over the fields towards their home.

"Slowly, slowly," cried Elka with a smile; for Arthur was going too fast for him.

"I promised Alice to return soon, and we are already belated," answered Arthur.

"That is not the reason," said Elka. "Only tell the truth, and say you are impatient to be with her again. I rejoice in your happiness, and hope it will last always."

"My love for Alice will never cease," exclaimed Arthur. "I owe not only my life, but the whole happiness of my life, to her."

On reaching home, Alice and the baroness received them in the cosily-furnished sitting-room. Alice hastened towards Arthur,

who clasped her in his arms. Elka approached his wife.

"We return without any prey," said he, extending his hand to her. "But it is your fault; for you wished us good luck when we left the house, and that is against the usage of huntsmen."

"To atone for this, I have a surprise for you," replied the baroness, looking up at her husband with a smile.

"A surprise?" repeated Elka sportively. "Do you think you can so easily excite my curiosity?"

"It is really a surprise," answered the baroness, "and such a one, indeed, that you can have no suspicion of it."

"You make me curious, upon my word."

"Read this," said the baroness, handing him a newspaper.

Elka took it quietly; but soon his hand began to tremble, his cheeks flushed, his eyes sparkled.

"Altenberg has been removed. The chambers desired his dismissal: the prince has yielded to this request, and dismissed him," he cried, looking at his wife with a half-amazed, half-inquiring expression, as if he could not yet believe the news.

"Well, had you any suspicion of this surprise?" she asked.

"No, no!" exclaimed Elka, reading the lines once more. "I did not expect this. I know, indeed, all the means he has employed to strengthen his position, and make himself indispensable to the prince. I believed he would sustain himself for years. He has followed me

soon. Many will rejoice; for he never understood how to win friends."

"The paper contains a second surprise for you," remarked the baroness. "Read on, farther down."

The baron read the following article: "The whole country may congratulate itself that a man is at length overthrown who has used the power and influence of his position, not for the welfare of the country, but only to promote his own interests. Altenberg amassed considerable property in his position; but, as we are informed by reliable men, he has lately lost almost every thing. He was fond of speculating in the bourse; and experience has taught that even a minister may be unlucky there. The banking-house S., which was closely connected with him, and through him lost largely, has withdrawn from all connection with him. Perhaps the ex-minister will now establish a banking-business of his own. He has time enough, if means are not wanting. Seldom has the fall of a man received so little pity. Fate has reached even him at last."

"Yes, fate has reached him," repeated Elka, when he had read these lines. "If this news is true, the loss of his property will be ten times more grievous to him than the loss of his position. His son, the captain, will also be obliged to lead a very different life. The wealth and power of his father have helped him out of many disagreeable situations. I fear he will hardly be able to contain himself."

"I do not pity him," said the

baroness. "Fortunately, he is still unmarried, and has no wife and family to draw into misery with him."

Elka understood these words, and secretly pressed the hand of his wife.

"I have long since seen my folly," said he softly, "and am happy that I have nothing to repent of with regard to Alice's fate."

At this moment, the servant brought in a letter, which had just been sent by an express messenger from the nearest post-office.

Elka's face turned red and pale as he took the letter, the large seal on which he knew only too well.

The baroness looked at her husband with eyes full of expectation.

At length he broke the seal with the haste of excitement. His eye ran over the letter; the blood rose to his cheek, his brow; his hand trembled slightly.

"Oscar, what has happened?" cried the baroness in consternation.

Elka looked up.

"I am called to a place in the newly-formed ministry. It is the wish of the prince that I should accept a portfolio," he cried.

For a moment the baroness looked at him in silence, as if she would read his decision in his eyes.

"And what will you do?" she then asked.

Elka looked at the letter as if lost in thought. He seemed to be struggling with himself.

"What will you do?" repeated the baroness.

"I shall decline the call," he answered in a firm voice.

"Oscar, will you not repent of this?" said the baroness.

"No," replied Elka. "This was once my highest wish, the aim of all my efforts, to which I have sacrificed much, much. I desire it no longer, now that I have learned to know the full, quiet happiness of domestic life. I will stay with you, share with you all our little joys and sorrows. Ambition is a foolish delusion; and never can it bestow upon me the happiness which I enjoy here. I stay with you."

Alice flew to his breast; the baroness seized his hand to thank him; Arthur shouted with delight.

With a happy, satisfied smile, Elka said, "A Latin poet, Horace, began one of his most beautiful poems thus: 'Beatus ille, qui procul negotiis.' Do you know what that means? Happy he, who, far from business, can spend the closing years of life in the circle of his loved ones; and Horace is right."

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